

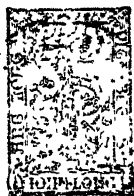
The Prize-Winning Novel in the
JOHN LONG £500 PRIZE COMPETITION
for the Best FIRST Novel

Good Grain

By
Emmeline Morrison

"You were just weak earth
With much in you, with much
And plenty of passion
But a little good grain."

—Brooding



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Good Grain

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GOOD GRAIN

CHAPTER I

IT was February, and a storm was raging on the Cornish coast. All day the rain had descended in torrents, and the wild north-west wind had swept the countryside like a tornado, crushing the young spring flowers as it tore on its cruel path.

Down in the bay the sea had risen and was dashing itself against the rocks. The boats were all in, but the sailors were watching anxiously for any lights or rockets out at sea, fearful of what the night might bring forth.

With the darkness the rain temporarily ceased, but there was no calming of the wind, and the sea showed little sign of having spent its fury. The clouds were scudding across the sky, and every now and again as they separated, one caught the gleam of a pale and watery moon, trying to shine upon a world of howling wind and roaring hungry sea from which it seemed all light had fled.

Geoffrey Tremayne stood on the beach and watched the mountainous waves. It was not cold, and, wrapped in a storm-coat, he had braved the elements and walked down after dinner at the little hotel to see Nature in one of her worst moods.

Exactly at what moment it was he never knew, but gradually he became aware that somewhere a voice was singing. Every now and again, when the wind died for a moment, it sounded loud and clear, and

even seemed to rival the gale. It was too dark to see anything, and difficult to believe that anybody could be out on such a night, but there were no cottages within half a mile, except the row of stone houses occupied by the fisher-folk.

Yet some one was singing. As the minutes went by he knew that it was not imagination, and that he, who was by nature and profession musician and composer, was not mistaken.

It was a human voice, singing out in the darkness like some spirit of the storm—singing something light and full of melody.

When the clouds parted for a few minutes and the pale moon came into her own again, he searched the shingly beach with his keen eyes for whoever it might be. The hotel visitors, few and old, offered no solution of the problem, and there was no one on the beach . . . yes, there was a boat drawn up on the shingle about a hundred yards away, and by the moon's dim light he could see that there was a man bending over it, engaged apparently in mending or cleaning it.

But that this man could be the singer was ridiculous, and yet even as he told himself so, the singing began again.

Without hesitation Tremayne walked down the stones until he stood alongside the little boat. The storm drowned his footsteps even on the shingle, and all the while the singing went on. But when he stood still, and his shadow fell athwart the boat, the voice stopped abruptly, and a figure stood up and faced him.

It was that of a young man in a rough blue jersey and trousers such as fishermen wear, bareheaded and barefooted.

"'Evening, sir," he said. "Blowin' hard, isn't it? Lost your way, perhaps?"

Tremayne stared at him before he spoke:

"Good evening," he answered. "No, I have not

lost my way. I came out to enjoy the storm. Was it you I heard singing ? ”

“ Yes, sir. I’m trimming up the boat. If the wind goes down we’re taking her across the bay to-morrow.”

“ But you can’t see ? ”

“ Don’t need to see—I can feel.”

The moon having decided to shine for a little while, Tremayne seated himself upon the other end of the boat, and lit a cigarette.

“ Where did you learn to sing like that ? I could hear you at the other end of the beach.”

“ I never learnt to sing, of course.” The boy seemed amused at the idea. “ I just can sing, that’s all. I’ve sung all my life.”

“ I believe you. You must have an extraordinarily powerful voice to be heard above this wind, a remarkable voice. What are you, a boatman ? ”

“ I help my father. He is a fisherman, and I sing when we’re at sea. That’s why my voice is so strong. I have been told I could sing well, and make a living at it if I took it up, but of course I have never had a chance, and don’t suppose I ever shall have. It costs a lot of money, and we have none but what my father earns.”

He spoke with a Cornish accent and the singsong which is part of it : but his speech was not the uneducated ungrammatical English one might have expected, and the voice was pleasant and refined. It was quite conceivable that it was the same voice which Tremayne had heard.

“ Sing again,” said Tremayne abruptly. “ Sing again, will you ? I’d like to hear you. I’m by way of being a musician, and your voice is rather remarkable.”

The boy laughed, and put down his knife and string.

“ Of course I can’t really sing a bit, but if you like——”

He did not seem to mind giving a second performance, and sang readily some old ballad, with a lilt and a swing, true to the rolling sea.

"You can sing," said Tremayne. His cigarette had gone out. "Where do you live?"

The boy pointed to the row of cottages, and volunteered the information that his father, mother, and himself lived in one of them. In the next cottage lived a girl whose family possessed a piano, at which he had learnt his notes. That was all he knew.

"Ever been to London?" asked Tremayne.

"No, sir. I'm not twenty-one yet. When I am, I am going to London. I shall try and get some work there, and see if I can earn enough to learn singing in my spare time, but I have to help my father now; there's no money to send me to London."

"But you'd like to go. Have you ever been away from here?"

"I have been to Truro. I was at school at Truro. I got a scholarship from the village school here, and father let me go."

He laughed, an infectious laugh.

"I don't know how I did it. I don't like learning, but I suppose the others must have been stupider than I was. I used to sing in the chapel choir here, and there too. It's starting to rain, sir. Hadn't you better be moving on?"

"Yes," agreed Tremayne, getting up. "Walk up with me to the hotel. I am interested in your voice, and I might be able to help you. You can leave your work on the boat, can't you?"

"Oh, yes." The boy pocketed the string readily, and went with him. He called Tremayne "sir" naturally, but he did not give the impression of being or considering himself inferior to his new acquaintance.

"With a voice like yours you ought to be in London, studying to become one of the great singers of our time," the musician, continued. "What is your name?"

"Cassillis," was the reply. "Julian Cassillis."

They walked along the front; it was raining, and the wind was blowing hard off the sea.

"A bleak spot," remarked Tremayne. "Have you lived here all your life? I am a Cornishman by birth, but I have not been here half a dozen times. I was motoring from Falmouth to Penzance, but the weather was so bad I put in here for a couple of nights."

He went on talking, but the boy had no conversation until Tremayne, as they came within sight of the hotel, suggested :

"Come up and see me to-morrow morning. I will try your voice properly with a piano, and tell you what possibilities there are in it. Can you come? It is a pity to miss an opportunity, and I assure you, your voice is worth it."

There was no hesitation; the boy said he would come, and added as an afterthought :

"Thank you, sir."

Then he began to talk about himself, telling Tremayne about his parents, his boyhood and his work, with almost disconcerting frankness. He was nearly twenty years of age, he said, and sometimes he wondered if he were really the son of the old people who said they were his parents.

"They are very kind to me," he said apologetically, "but they are very old to have a son as young as I am, and I am so very different from them. You will understand if you see them. Are you staying long, sir?"

It had been Tremayne's intention to leave the following day; there seemed nothing to do here, but suddenly he changed his mind, looking in the dim light at the young face alongside him.

"The weather is so unsettled, I shall probably be here for another day or two; and now that I have heard you sing, I should like to test your voice. It is a hobby of mine, discovering genius, and I rather think you must be something of one."

They came to the gates of the hotel. Rough wooden gates, with huge stone pillars intended to hold them against such storms as these.

Tremayne stopped and held out his hand ; he scarcely knew why.

" Good night," he said. " I fancy we are both artists of the same calibre. Come to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock and ask for Mr. Tremayne."

The boy said " Thank you " again, but no more, and that was drowned by the gale and roar of the sea below them. But he shook hands with a firm grip, as if he were accustomed to it, and he looked his new acquaintance straight in the eyes as he did so.

" An extraordinary youth," said Tremayne to himself, as he went indoors. " Never the son of fisher-folk, unless he is a throwback. More likely seadrift from some wreck. There must be many on a coast like this."

He forgot about the storm in thinking of his new discovery.

CHAPTER II

IN the morning he wondered what impulse had made him invite the boy to call on him ; and came to the conclusion that the storm must have been responsible for it.

Over his breakfast he laughed to think of himself telling a fisherman that he was a genius and ought to be in London studying so as to become a great singer.

In the daylight, when the wind had calmed down and the sea was no longer raging like a hungry beast of prey, his action seemed ridiculous.

He even wondered what the management at the hotel and his fellow-guests, few though they were, would think when this extraordinary young man came (if he did come) to see him.

Tremayne was president of a musical society for the promotion of modern and classical music. He was also a composer, but the fault of his compositions was that they were totally above the heads of any ordinary public, and above the ability of any ordinary pianist.

Apart from his art, he was a very rich man, with an estate in Oxfordshire, and no relatives to share it with him.

Music was his world and his life, though he was still a young man as years go, and had not yet reached the age of forty.

Good looking, too, as many women would have told him had they been given the opportunity, with his dreamer's eyes and musician's hands, his brushed-back dark hair, and artist's brow.

* * * * *

The porter did not even look astonished. He said, "There is a young man to see you, sir," and ushered the boy into the sitting-room.

Tremayne stared. The boy of the storm and the beach stood before him, hesitating whether to shake hands or not. He was dressed in a suit of rough blue serge, and black boots ; his shirt was open at the neck. The mop of fair hair was brushed, and had evidently been washed, for it was still wet, and the eyes were startlingly blue. He might have been a fisherman, but it did not take Tremayne a second to recognize that somewhere there was breeding in this strange product ; birth, breeding, and possibly genius.

He settled the matter by shaking hands.

"Come in," he invited. "I wondered whether you would turn up."

Young Cassillis's eyes had instinctively wandered across the room to the piano ; he eyed it with a longing look which meant a great deal.

"Yes, I came, as you were kind enough to say you would try my voice. I had a job to make my father let me stay ashore, though. What a lot of music you have ; I wish I could play. Do you play, sir ?"

"Yes. I was trying a piece sent to me to review. I will play it to you presently, and you shall tell me what you think of it. I shall know by your criticism how much music you have in you," with a smile. "Did you tell your parents you were coming to see me this morning ?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but they don't understand my love of music, nor my wanting to sing. They think the sea is a good enough life for any man, but it's not enough for me. The old man may be my father, but I don't agree with him, and they both know that when I am older I am going away to work." It seemed to amuse him, though there was some contempt in his tone. "I believe they are a little bit afraid of me. It's funny !"

"What sort of work would you do if you went to

London," asked Tremayne, "and how could you combine it with studying music?"

"I suppose I couldn't, unless I got work at a theatre. I might do that, and they might give me a chance."

Tremayne stared hard at him, turning him over in his mind.

"Are you the son of the people you live with?"

"They say I am."

"Do you know anything about the stage?"

The boy gave all the information which he had on that subject. It amounted to the fact that two years ago, a visitor had come to the village, staying at this same hotel, and Cassillis had taken him out fishing on several occasions. A casual acquaintance had sprung up between them; the man was an actor, and told Cassillis that he ought to be on the stage.

He had only been inside a theatre once in his life, and that was to see a Shakespearc play—he had never heard music in a theatre. The actor had given him some songs when he went away, but he could not sing them.

Tremayne listened and nodded. "It's a rotten life," he said, "when all is said and done, unless you get to the top of the tree. And I am afraid you are too old to be anything in that line but a wandering player. Now let me hear you sing. You don't know any music?"

"Only by ear. I just know my notes, but I can't play, and can't read music. If you can give me the tune, I can sing anything."

It was not a vain boast, as Tremayne found out. The boy could literally sing anything, and his voice was remarkably pure, strong and clear. It was untrained and entirely lacking in control, but it was a wonderful voice nevertheless; and the musician knew that with proper tuition and training there was a fortune in it.

He listened, sampled, and criticized for nearly an

hour, full of a new interest, and he was followed with keen enthusiasm by the young man, who was thoroughly and obviously enjoying himself.

Then after a pause, during which Cassillis looked through the music as if he would devour it with his hungry soul, Tremayne said abruptly :

“I’ll train your voice, Cassillis.”

The boy looked up, staring with wide-opened eyes.

“I’ll take you away and train you for the concert stage, if you’ll come. It won’t be a joke for you, though, for you’ll have to give up your parents, your friends, your open-air life and the sea ; and you will have to work harder probably than you have ever worked before. It will mean years of work and study to you, and much patience, but I can tell you now, it will be worth it in the end.”

The boy did not speak ; his eyes were on the music beneath his hand.

Tremayne went on to explain the object of the society of which he was president.

It was that young people with genius, and no money, should be given their chance, trained and brought out in London. The training of Cassillis, therefore, would be paid for by the society, and not by himself, and it would cost the boy nothing.

“Will your parents let you go ?” he asked.

“They will have to,” was the reply, “if you give me the opportunity. If they don’t, I shall go without asking them. Why should I be bound to stay here ? They don’t need me, even if anything happens to my father. There are neighbours who would look after my mother, and there’s money saved for her. Yes, if you’ll give me a chance, I’ll come ; indeed I will, and I’ll work hard for you.”

“You have a wonderful voice, and it would be wicked not to use it, and to waste your life here when there may be a great future waiting for you. Your parents can be brought to understand that, I

think. I will go myself and see them to-day. You will have to lose no time."

He moved away to the writing table.

"I suppose you have never heard of John Higston, the baritone? He is almost the greatest singer of the day, and I will take you to him, and see what he says about you."

"And what about a living, sir?" asked the boy then. "I have no money, and I should have to live out, I suppose. Would it be in London, and should I do anything else?"

"No, you would devote your whole time to the one thing. You might live in London later on; that would depend upon your masters, but to begin with, you would have to go abroad, probably to Vienna or Rome, or both. If you worked hard, I think you might do it in five years, and as to the money——"

He stopped and hesitated. The blue eyes were fixed upon him with earnest questioning, and again it struck Tremayne what an extraordinary boy he had found; he wondered at the refined, almost delicate features, the finely-cut mouth and soft hair. The boy looked an aristocrat. Upon his soul he did! And the second impulse came upon him as suddenly as the first.

"Of course if you come with me, your future will be my care. I like your looks, and I think it will be interesting to see what we can make of you. What has your education been? You speak remarkably well, though of course you have an accent, of which you will have to rid yourself."

He went on to talk about technical matters and music, giving Cassillis some idea of what the work would be. For a long time they discussed the possibilities of it all, and Tremayne had the feeling even then, that he was slowly being influenced by this boy from the sea, to the point of enchantment. It was astonishing, for no one had ever told him, nor would he have believed it, that he was subject to violent or foolish

impulses; yet there it was. Within an hour or two Tremayne found that he had told this boy that he would take him to London in a few days, would make himself his legal guardian—with his parents' consent—would have him to live with him until some other arrangement could be made; would, in fact, do everything for him, and all out of pure philanthropy since there was, of course, considerable doubt as to when, or if, the boy would be in a position to repay him.

"I have plenty of money," he said carelessly, in reply to an anxious inquiry on that score, "don't worry about that. I will go and see your father this evening after the boats come in."

* * * * *

Tremayne had another shock that evening when he stood within the tiny cottage room and looked at the parents.

They called themselves Gideon and Deborah Cassilis, and described themselves as fisher-folk. They had lived in this village all their lives, and their parents before them, and they said that this boy was their son.

But they did not look at each other when they said it, nor at him. They were typical Cornish seafolk, the man rough and hard, the woman timid and tired-faced, wearing a shawl over her bent form, and neatly parted grey hair. They were just as different from the bright-haired, blue-eyed boy as could be. And, as he had said, they seemed almost afraid of him, as of something which they did not understand.

"A mystery," thought Tremayne. "This boy is not their son, and they know it, and are afraid to tell the truth. More than ever do I want to take him away and see what he will make of himself."

They sent Julian out of the cottage while they talked. He said he would go and tell Mary, who lived next door, and was waiting for him on the beach.

Tremayne wondered rather uneasily who Mary

was, but cast out the thought as he argued with the old people to let the boy go. He won his case, of course, but he had the feeling that it was because they were afraid to refuse, or knew that the boy would take the law into his own hands if they did; not because they wanted him to be a success.

It was not a long interview, and then they called Julian in, and told him that he was to go with Tremayne to London in three days.

"I will look after him," promised Tremayne, "and I know we shall be friends. I like your boy"—he did not say "your son"—"he is full of music and charm, and I will make him great."

They smiled at each other and went out together.

As they passed along the front, a girl's voice called out "Good night," and Julian answered with a laugh, "Good night, Mary."

Tremayne asked him about her, and learned that they had been children together, and friends all their lives.

"There is nothing between you, I hope?" asked Tremayne.

The boy looked puzzled.

"No understanding?"—rather impatiently. "Girls and boys grow up quickly in the country, even marry young, and I must have you free."

Cassilis laughed at that, and said frankly that he had never thought of such a thing.

"We have been like brother and sister, and she is older than I."

"Still—" Tremayne shrugged his shoulders, "one never knows, and you are a good-looking boy. I am glad it is so. I want no entanglements of that sort. Nothing hinders a man so much in a career as a woman."

CHAPTER III

JULIAN CASSILLIS'S life had been that of any other boy of his kind. His earliest memory was of the sea, sand, and shingle, and almost as soon as he could walk he seemed to be able to manage a boat. There was no wonder in that, for all the boys could do the same, but there was considerable wonder that almost as soon as he could talk he could sing.

At first his parents called it a noise, but when the neighbours and school teachers said it was music, and the clergyman came and asked him to sing in the choir, they began to get the half-frightened look about which Julian had spoken to Tremayne, and upon which was based his suspicion that he was not their son.

He had not, however, expected, in spite of it, that they would so readily allow him to go with Tremayne, and it had been with amazement that he had listened to his mother give her consent.

Even then, until he had actually left the village, he was uncertain whether they would not change their minds.

Nothing of the sort happened, fortunately. Tremayne and he left Coastcliff in the latter's car, spent a night on the way at Exeter, and reached London the following evening.

* * * * *

London was a terrible disappointment to Julian, if the truth must be told. He had read much about it, and imagined a great deal more, until his over-romantic mind had pictured a sort of ancient Rome; and the

arrival on a wet early spring evening was depressing in the extreme.

The hotel, however, made up for his first disillusion. The Cimric, where Tremayne lived when he was in town, and where he had his suite of rooms, was all that could be desired and more than he had dreamed of, and Julian Cassilis took to it, and the life generally, as to the manner born. He liked the luxuriously furnished rooms, the grand piano, the many books and pictures and the gorgeous flowers with which the musician was kept constantly supplied. All these things appealed to his artistic sense.

He liked the clothes Tremayne's tailor made for him, and the ministrations of the barber; he liked the epicurean meals with his new guardian in the hotel restaurant; he absorbed all his new experiences, and expanded with the coming spring.

Tremayne was more than satisfied. The boy was a new amusement, apart from his art, and he was a lonely man. Though he told himself he had been a fool to do it, he did not regret it.

There was an indefinable something about this boy which had forced him to this extraordinary action, but the most curious part was that Julian himself did not see how extraordinary it was.

To him it all appeared to have happened naturally, and his new attitude towards life was that Tremayne had taken him out of a wrong groove and put him into a right one.

After a few days, when the strangeness had worn off, Tremayne was looking at the boy and wondering if it were not all a dream: the storm, and the voice singing out in the darkness; the blue-eyed young fisherman, and his own astounding offer to take and train him for the concert stage.

It seemed that Julian was a boy of his own class, fresh from the West Country, young and ignorant, but not what he appeared to be. And the solution,

that he was a mystery child from the sea, grew with the passing days.

Even the critical Tremayne was more than satisfied, and had to admit that he was a very attractive boy. He began to wish he need not part with him, but naturally this life was no help towards the necessary training. They spent an interesting fortnight, for Julian was anxious to "do" London thoroughly, and see as much as possible while he had the chance. They did the round of the theatres, and went to all the available concerts; then more serious things had to be considered. Tremayne arranged for him to go into the country for the next few months, until he knew a little more about the world in which he was to live, had learned to speak pure English, and a good many other things which his guardian thought he ought to know; not because they would help him much in his musical career, but because he wanted the boy as a future companion for himself.

In point of fact, this was what he had intended all along, and what had formed the basis of his generosity. The boy had taken his fancy, and at all times an eccentric man, he had been prompted to satisfy both the soul of the young singer and his own loneliness.

In the same spirit he selected for Julian's temporary home a country vicarage where he himself had been tutored twenty years before. The same clergyman still took two or three private pupils to coach, and though Julian needed no more learning, the society of the vicar and his wife, and one or two other young men of Julian's own age, would, he reckoned, be good for him, and give him the necessary polish.

Here, too, he could visit him every week, and would be able to keep in personal touch with him.

"I would much rather live with you," said Julian more than once. "But as you want me to go to this

place, of course I must. Shall I be able to sing there ? ”

“Of course. You will have singing lessons, and your studies. And it will only be for a few months; then I shall send you abroad. You will like the vicar; and there is another boy there whom I want you to meet. You will take to him, I hope, and be friends.”

“Is he like you ? ” asked Julian frankly. “I hope so.”

Tremayne smiled at the unconscious flattery.

“Not at all. But I do not want you to copy me. Keep your own individuality. It is a mistake to copy any one, or take another man for an idol. You have all the good in yourself.”

He went on to give Julian a little sound and moral counsel. He thought perhaps it might be necessary, and it could do no harm. But Julian looked rather puzzled and a little bored.

“Mustn’t I lie over anything ? ”

“No.”

“Isn’t the truth sometimes more hurtful than a lie ? ”

“There are exceptions, of course, but it is better to make a rule always to speak the truth.”

“Must not one even lie for a woman’s sake ? ”

It was such a curious remark that Tremayne stared at him a moment before answering, then—

“I hope such a thing will not be necessary,” he replied. “Keep your respect for women, Julian, wherever you are and go. Respect them and honour them, and you will not need to stoop to lies.”

The boy nodded and sighed. He liked life, and all it offered, but he did not like moral lectures. Tremayne laughed at his expression and got up.

“Come along,” he exclaimed, “I’m going to take you to see John Higston.”

* * * * *

The visit was both a pleasure and a disappointment. John Higston came from Yorkshire; he had started

life in a cotton mill there. He was working in the factory when it was discovered—very much in the same way that Tremayne had discovered Julian—that he had one of the most wonderful baritone voices in the world.

He was now singing at Covent Garden, and famed the world over.

His name, as Julian found very soon after reaching London, was placarded about town, and was known everywhere. The papers gave him headlines, and columns, and Julian looked upon it as the supreme moment of his life when Tremayne and himself were taken up and ushered into the great man's presence.

It was disappointing, however, to find that the singer was both middle-aged and stout. He wore a low collar, a moustache, and looked rather like a well-to-do shopkeeper in a Northern town. And though he sang exquisitely in three or four languages, his speaking voice was rather common, and his whole manner and conversation just missed being coarse.

He knew Tremayne well, and was very pleasant, and much interested in Julian and the discovery.

He heard the boy sing, and was pleased. He praised his voice and recommended him to go on the stage.

Tremayne snorted at that. "I hate the stage," he said quite crossly. "and I am not going to train him for that."

"Why not?" asked the great man good-humouredly; "there is money in the stage and a quicker return than in concert work. I don't know, but I should say that boy's mother was an actress."

Tremayne laughed at the suggestion, but Julian remained silent and thoughtful, and did not resent it, rather to his guardian's surprise. That ended the interview.

Tremayne got up somewhat disappointed, and repeated: "I am not going to let him go on the stage," at which the singer merely laughed and said.

"He will if he wants to. They always do," and shook hands.

But Julian was secretly rather pleased. He enjoyed the light musical comedies which he had seen with Tremayne and fancied that he would like to sing that sort of music. It was easier, and undoubtedly the life would be pleasanter. He wished Tremayne would let him go on the stage, and not send him into the country.

It sounded so very dull. It was as dull as the photograph of the vicarage and the vicar, and in startling contrast to a photograph of a girl which was on Tremayne's chimneypiece in his sitting-room. Julian was sure that she was an actress, she was so pretty, but he had not the courage to ask. He wondered again to-day, as they left the spacious room, if there were any reason for Tremayne's dislike to the stage, and connected it with the photograph.

That night they went to the theatre to hear the latest musical comedy. Tremayne was bored, but the boy enjoyed it.

"Would you like to do this sort of thing?" asked the former.

"I think I should. I believe Mr. Higston was right."

"I would much rather you did not. You are too good for it."

Then an odd thing happened, which Julian long remembered.

When they were passing out through the foyer, some one stopped them and said, "Hullo, Geoffrey!"

It was so unusual to hear Tremayne called by his Christian name that they both turned, confronting a little round woman, with a piquant pink-and-white face, and masses of yellow hair, the colour of ripe corn.

Tremayne looked at her, and his face went black as thunder.

"Good evening, Lady Hammond," he said, stiffly,

and would have passed on, but she barred their way.

"I have not seen you for ages. Forgotten what you look like!" She spoke in a high-pitched, though quite pretty voice. "You never come and see me now. And who is your pretty boy?"

Tremayne had no alternative. He introduced Cassillis, and she looked him over and laughed into his eyes.

"One of Mr. Tremayne's musical geniuses," she said with a laugh. "You look it. But he had much better let you go on the stage. I can give you a personal intro to Calvey——"

Tremayne promptly and flatly refused. Julian thought he was almost rude over it; thought, too, that the lady was very pretty and kind to take such a sudden interest in him. He smiled back at her, but Tremayne said "Good night," and walked on.

"She was an actress herself before she married," he explained later on. "And she is always looking for recruits for the stage."

But that, thought Julian, did not account for his unusual temper.

CHAPTER IV

TREMAYNE took Julian down to Hendley himself, and introduced him to the vicarage.

They were met at the station by a young man with a little runabout car, whom Tremayne introduced to Julian as "Langley." They looked at each other from top to toe; then they shook hands and it was the beginning of a lifetime friendship.

Langley was the son of a West End physician, and was "taking it easily" for a few months at the vicarage, after a nervous breakdown from overwork. He was studying for Holy Orders, which had no interest for Julian, but he liked the man, and was greatly consoled thereby, for he had been rather depressed at the thought of losing Tremayne, who was his only friend, and going again among strangers.

He did not care about the vicar, but decided that he was a quiet man who would probably let him do what he liked, and not interfere; he bore his questioning with patience, though his eyes strayed to the garden where he could see Tremayne and Langley talking. He said he did not mind which church he went to, if the music were good, and added that Tremayne had taken him to St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey, and he had "enjoyed it very much." He did not know whether he had been christened or not; he had been to Sunday School, but had not liked it.

When Tremayne left—he was going on to some friends in the neighbourhood to dinner, and returning by the last train to town—he placed Julian in Langley's care.

Langley was inclined to be very friendly, but he stared a little at Julian's somewhat irrelevant questions.

"Does Mr. Tremayne always go to Stapleton Court?"

"Yes, always," was the reply. "Why?"

They were in Julian's bedroom, supposed to be unpacking.

"Is there a girl there?"

"There is Mr. Stapleton's daughter, but how did you know?"

"Mr. Tremayne took me with him one day to call on a Mrs. Stapleton, at a hotel, and they spoke of 'Iris.' I wondered about it, that's all."

"She is only a little girl," said Langley; and then—"Are you going to have singing lessons while you are here?" he added.

Julian took the rebuke, and changed the subject. He told Langley what Tremayne's plans for him were, and added that he hoped to live with him eventually.

"He is rather splendid, and I should like to become like him."

That amused Langley. "I shouldn't," he returned. "He is a very good man, of course, very charitable and all that, but he is awfully hard. I have known him many years, and he is very peculiar. I should be sorry for you, or any one who crossed him and got on his wrong side. You, of course, are very much on the right side, and I should keep there if I were you."

Cassillis looked at him in astonishment. He was learning something new.

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In the vicar's study was a copy of the same photograph which had adorned Tremayne's chimneypiece; the photograph of a pretty girl.

This was extraordinary, and Julian inquired into it the first time he saw it.

"That is the Stapleton girl," said Langley shortly.

"You seem very much interested in her, I don't know why."

"I am not interested in the least," retorted Julian; "I am merely curious, and I admire beauty."

"Then I should not admire in that direction. Leave her alone," said Langley quietly.

Langley did not like discussing other people, but apart from this one subject, he and Cassillis were soon the best of friends. Langley was the elder in years and far ahead in worldly experience, but Cassillis was oddly enough more of a man. He had left school at sixteen to work with men, and in some ways he was very old.

He picked up languages with remarkable ease, and he became a great reader, spending every minute away from the piano, or study of harmony and theory, among the books of the vicar's library, but he did not read the classics or learned books.

Neither histories nor biographies interested him in the least; he liked books of music, novels and poems. He even yawned over the lives of the famous musicians which Tremayne had sent him, and turned to "Omar, Khayyám" or "The Garden of Kama."

Tremayne came down every week, and was most kind. He made it quite apparent that he intended to adopt Julian altogether, and Langley remarked with a little irony upon it more than once.

"Lucky for you, wasn't it? He seems awfully keen on you, and probably he'll have you to live with him when he is married and settled at Trclawn; he'll give you a handsome allowance and treat you like a younger brother."

Julian flushed a little at his words, and his tone.

"Yes, I am lucky," he admitted, "and I should like that very much. It's not his money—I should think just as much of him if he had none—it's the man himself, and all that he has done for me and for my career. It was a lucky chance, and I can't understand why he did it."

"I think he is a lonely man, and would be glad to have had a son. But of course he may yet, he is still young."

"Never in this world!" Julian laughed. "He is too old for that."

* * * * *

Julian had been six weeks at the vicarage. It was May and he found Eve in the garden of Eden.

It was a golden day, and walking in the meadow beyond the orchard at the foot of the vicarage garden, Julian rescued a black kitten from a may-tree, and in so doing made Iris Stapleton's acquaintance.

She stood in the long grass among the buttercups, in a background of may-trees in bloom; a pretty girl in a white dress with a peach-bloom skin, and golden-brown hair all waves.

Julian recognized her instantly as the original of the two photographs, and they needed no introduction.

She said "Thank you; that was kind of you to rescue my kitten," but did not add that seeing him in the distance, she had climbed the wall from their garden, and had encouraged the kitten to go up the tree on purpose. But it did not matter, because he was quite ready to open the acquaintance.

In five minutes they were sitting together on the river-bank telling each other all about themselves.

She asked him his name, because she only knew him as a new pupil at the vicarage, and when he told her "Julian Cassillis," she said:

"Then I shall call you Julian. Don't mind, do you? And you are going to be a singer. I'd love to hear you sing, I adore music."

Julian modestly declared he was "not much good" yet, but it appeared that Tremayne had already told them at Stapleton Court about him and that they looked upon him as a genius.

"I can do nothing," said the girl with an envious sigh, "I often wish I could."

"It doesn't matter to a girl," he replied chivalrously. "Beauty is the only thing which matters to a girl, and you are as beautiful as Guinevere in 'The Idylls of the King.'"

The simile pleased her, because she, too, loved poetry and knew Tennyson as well as he. She told him all about the books she had read (they were not many, for her grandmother did not approve of modern novels); he told her about his life in Cornwall, while the sunny afternoon wore away.

Iris was quite the most disturbing thing Julian had ever met. She interrupted him every minute to tell him something she had forgotten, and her conversation was punctuated with slang.

Then she found that the kitten had scratched his wrist and it was bleeding, so that she had to bind it up with her handkerchief.

That also was done with an object, but Julian was too inexperienced to know, even when she informed him that he would have to meet her again to return it.

"I will get Mr. Tremayne to bring you over to our house next time he comes," she said. "But of course you couldn't give it to me then, or they would know how we had met, and I am not supposed to get over the wall like this and meet young men. I don't, as a matter of fact, but I just happened to see you, and I had heard so much about you that I thought I'd like to see what you were like."

She asked him how old he was, and he told her he was twenty; she was only seventeen, but her manner was even younger than that.

"When shall I come and return you the handkerchief?" he asked, when at last she cut short the interview and decided that it was time she went.

"I can come any day. We play tennis some afternoons, but——"

Iris was quick to tell him he must not miss the games

or it would give rise to suspicion. She made an appointment for two days ahead, and was amused to see how eagerly he accepted it. How eagerly, too, he accepted her hand, held out to him as she said "Good-bye."

CHAPTER V

TREMAYNE had gone to Scotland on business and did not come to Hendley for three weeks. By that time the acquaintance between the girl and boy had ripened into a firm comradeship.

No one knew anything about it but Langley, and he looked upon it as a joke, and if he disapproved, well, that was nothing and made no difference.

When Tremayne came down to Stapleton Court for the week-end, he took Julian there himself and introduced him to Iris.

It was then for the first time that the boy showed his acting abilities, for his guardian never even suspected that the two had met before, and Langley, who was also present, did not even get a joke out of it.

After that, within a few weeks, the summer vacation came, and Julian accompanied Tremayne abroad on his first real holiday.

They went to Paris and Italy, and spent a week in Rome, where he was to begin his real work at Christmas.

* * * * *

It was the end of September before he returned to Hendley, and his first thought was to rush down to the river, their usual meeting place, and see if Iris was there.

She was not; and he returned to the vicarage in the deepest depression, to be blandly informed by Langley:

"Miss Stapleton is away. She will be back on Monday."

That time the shot struck home. The boy went very red and made no reply.

Tremayne came down the following week and stayed again at Stapleton Court.

His friend Jack Stapleton, an invalid at all times, had been ailing anew, tired with a long hot summer. It was impossible to move him to the sea, and Iris had been sent away to friends to give her a necessary change. There was little money in the Stapleton family, and old Mrs. Stapleton, Iris's grandmother, remained to look after her son herself. Tremayne would have done everything for them, and paid for everything also, but this could not be considered, even in the interests of friendship or something deeper.

He suggested it tentatively again on this visit, but Mrs. Stapleton only smiled and shook her head.

"We manage very well," she told him. "Iris studies a little with her father, and she reads many books; and as for Jack, he is no trouble. We like to look after him ourselves, and unfortunately it may not be for long."

In Cassillis, for the first time, Tremayne noticed a change. He was growing up very quickly and getting to look a man; he had lost his boyishness, and his face had a slightly worried look, which puzzled Tremayne a little. It was an indefinable "something" which seemed like an influence, and he missed the usual chatter and brightness which had first attracted him to the boy.

He told Langley about it, and asked his opinion, but Langley only smiled and said in his slow way:

"I shouldn't worry about him, Mr. Tremayne. He is growing up, you know, and he is bound to change."

"Yes, he has changed, that is just it," replied Tremayne. "And what is the cause of it?"

Langley did not speak; he focussed his eyes on a distant scene, and left Tremayne to go on.

"Was he all right when he spent the last week-end of the vacation with you?"

"Oh, quite. He is an awfully nice chap, and my people liked him very much. I shall be sorry when he goes."

"So shall I, but I am inclined to think that he does not do enough here and will be the better for proper work. Perhaps Hendley doesn't suit him."

"It ought to, but I think, too, he wants more to do. He has always been used to work, and of course we all idle here, though we are not supposed to. And Cassillis doesn't like learning, either. The only books he reads are novels and poems."

Tremayne nodded. "I know. Yes, I'll take him away at Christmas, and send him to Rome. I don't like his looks."

"I shouldn't worry about him, Mr. Tremayne," repeated Langley calmly, "you will find that he will change again, and I have got my eye on him, you know."

Tremayne laughed at that. He liked Langley, and had great faith in his influence.

He went back to Stapleton Court and dined.

Iris was there, very demure in a white dress, with a green bow tying up her thick plait of hair. She, too, for some reason, was very quiet and not quite her usual gay, irresponsible self, and he thought that he must ask her what was the matter. She treated him as a guardian and her oldest friend, and usually made him her confidant.

But after dinner he could not find her. It was a beautiful night at the end of September; there was a harvest moon, yellow as butter, and looking out he wondered if she were in the garden.

He asked her grandmother, but Mrs. Stapleton did not know.

"I have not seen her," she said, "and I do not think Iris would go out at night alone, even in the garden."

The elderly woman who served them as maid was passing through the hall and heard his question.

She stopped, and as Mrs. Stapleton passed on she said, "Miss Iris has gone down through the orchard, sir. She put her coat on and I expect she has gone down to the river."

"Down to the river alone in the dark?" Tremayne looked astonished and dismayed. "Whatever is she thinking of?"

"She won't be alone, sir," the woman smiled. "Miss Iris meets one of the vicar's young gentlemen. Bless their hearts, sir, say I! They are all young things and 'tis summer!"

Tremayne stared at her a moment, and with a word of thanks he went out, his unlit cigar in his hand.

He walked briskly down the moss-green path away from the house, across the lawn sloping gently down to the orchard, the wall, and beyond to the meadows and the river. Near the house some attempt had been made to keep the place tidy. The man-of-all-work had mown the grass and Iris had weeded the beds, but the box edging had overgrown in every direction, and the herbaceous borders had run into a tangle of flowers; while beyond the lawn the whole garden was a wilderness of long grass and weeds, in some places so overgrown as to render the path impassable.

Tremayne thought of Trelawn, his own beautiful home in Oxfordshire, with its perfectly kept gardens, its trimmed hedges, bright flowerbeds and hot-houses. He longed to send gardeners to Stapleton Court to tidy up the place and put it in order, but it could not be done.

That would have been charity, and charity was impossible.

There was no path to the wall, except one trodden through the long grass, but just at one point the broken piece could be seen, and he went along until he sighted this spot.

Then he saw that the servant had not been wrong. Iris was there.

She had a long coat over her white dress, but it did not hide her bright hair, turned to silver by the moon's brilliance, and he stood still. It was a cruel, merciless moon, for it lit up not only the girl's bright hair, but the clear features of the boy who was with her, and he saw that it was Julian Cassillis!

They were close together. So close that their heads touched and their hair mingled, and on the still night air came the sound of Iris's rippling laugh, and the name "Julian."

No eavesdropper, Tremayne had no desire to listen. He struck a match noisily and lit his cigar deliberately, standing motionless on the path in the moonlight. But his keen eyes saw the two figures spring apart—and there was a sudden silence.

After a minute or two, his cigar alight, he turned and walked slowly back to the house, not looking back once, and giving Iris plenty of time to get there first.

He was in an awkward corner now. He did not know either what to do or to think. It was obvious, that unknown to her grandmother and father, and equally unknown to him, these two children were meeting each other by appointment, at night, or at least after dark. Iris was over seventeen and she was not backward, although she had been old-fashionedly brought up to be both ignorant and innocent. But Cassillis was twenty, and he did not know what the boy was, whether he would turn out good or bad. He was a "chance," and though he knew Cassillis was good-tempered and affectionate, quiet and of an artistic, dreamy temperament, he could not tell yet if he would be morally straight or crooked. Neither could he tell how much influence Langley, or even he himself, would have upon this other mind. But he did know that Cassillis was almost a man, that the impression he had given the vicar's household, that he preferred his own company, was not correct, and that these night meetings with Iris could not continue.

Probably he had been used to this sort of thing at his

old home, and did not know that he was doing anything out of the ordinary, but in that case he must be told.

Iris knew, of course, but she would not shut her eyes to a possible adventure for the sake of what was "correct," not if he knew Iris! And rather uncomfortably he wondered how much Iris did know—probably a good many things which she would have been better without knowing, whilst doubtless there were a good many things which she ought to have been taught. He did not think she was quite so innocent as her grandmother and her father thought she was. She had read too many books, and were there not always newspapers lying about for her eyes? Those, and the servants, and now these boys from the vicarage, were sufficient to do all that was necessary, and perhaps a little too much.

He sat down by the pond to think it out. It was a round basin of water, in which at one time there had been goldfish, and a fountain in the centre. There were no goldfish now, and the fountain was broken, but a few water-lilies still bloomed on the clear surface, and the still white marble rim glistened in the moonlight.

Tremayne continued smoking his cigar, giving himself time to think quietly, and Iris opportunity to get back to the house.

He remembered, as he sat there, the girl he had seen Cassillis with at Coastcliff, correspondence with whom he had objected to, fearing still, in spite of the boy's protestations, that there might be something between them. He wondered now whether he had been wise. Evidently the boy's nature was one that wanted feminine companionship, even if it were only that of a girl, and, deprived of one, he had chosen another.

Of course it was nothing—but Tremayne wished it had not happened. And he could not let it pass unchallenged.

When he reached the house again, it was ten o'clock, and Iris was in bed. Her grandmother said she

had come in almost as soon as he had gone out. "She was out looking for the cat."

Tremayne smiled grimly, but said nothing to her.

The next morning, when they met at breakfast, Iris was a little confused and nervous. He saw guilt at once. If it had been an accidental meeting, why did she not openly speak about it, or about Cassilis? She had seen him, and she knew that he had seen her.

He waited, talking to her father and reading the papers, until about eleven o'clock, when he saw Iris with a couple of baskets starting for the orchard. Then he followed her.

She told him that she was going to pick up the apple and pear windfalls, and he offered to accompany her.

Iris threw a glance of suspicion at him, but she dare not outrage the hospitality of the house by appearing not to want him.

They went, therefore, down to the orchard together. Tremayne talked about the garden, and how much he wished that he had the keeping of it.

Iris said she wished so too, and was sick of the garden, but when he asked her if she would not like to go away and travel, she gave a very emphatic "No."

"I am quite happy at home, and I do not find it dull. Besides, I could not leave daddy; he might want me."

"How would you like a lady companion, then? Your grandmother is getting on in years, and it would be rather nice, wouldn't it, to have a younger companion?"

Iris shook her head at that, and asked if he preferred to pick up apples or pears.

She was on her guard now, and he saw it. He said that he would pick up pears (there were fewer of them), and while he slowly did so he readjusted his

When the baskets were full, and Iris sat down on the grass to eat an apple with the keen relish of a child, he told her about last night.

To his surprise she did not deny it, nor make any excuse. She simply said, "Yes, I do meet him sometimes. Why shouldn't I?"

"But that was a prearranged meeting, and you ought not to do it."

"Does it concern you, Mr. Tremayne?"

"Naturally. Cassillis is my ward, and in his interest as well as your own it must be stopped. You know nothing about him, Iris."

"Yes, I do. He has told me, and if you do stop it, as you say, you will do more harm than good. Don't be stupid! Julian is a dear, nice boy, and we are jolly good pals. Why spoil it?"

"I don't want to spoil it, but why meet him at night?"

"Well, we don't usually, but it was moonlight, and rather fun."

Tremayne drew his brows together; this was something he did not like and could not approve of. He inquired whose suggestion it was, and was not surprised to learn that it was hers.

"You have not told your father about your friendship with Cassillis, I suppose?"

"Daddy is ill. I never worry him, and I believe you are only making a fuss just for the pleasure of lecturing me. Goodness knows why you should, for you are not my father nor my guardian."

"You have just said that your father is too ill to be troubled by such things, so that answers your question. And if you do not promise me to give it up, I shall tell him."

"You'll be a beast if you do!" she flashed, "and I won't promise."

There was silence between them then.

"Why don't you go to him?" she demanded.
"Why come to me?"

"Julian is innocent of any wrong, and I do not want to spoil him."

"I shall not spoil him. We are only friends. It is a shame that one cannot have a good time without all this fuss."

Tremayne came forward and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Are you only friends, Iris? Is he all right with you?"

This time her eyes widened in her own innocence, and she answered honestly, "Of course."

"He treats you respectfully, and is a gentleman?"

"Of course he is. I don't believe Julian could help being one, and do you think I should like him if he were not?"

He looked into her clear eyes, and let her go.

"Promise me you will not meet him again after dark, and I will say nothing more."

She smiled at him, and promised readily. It was not satisfactory, and he did not know whether he trusted her or not, but it was all that he could do at that time.

* * * * *

A week later an old friend of his, Mrs. Humphreys, a widow, came to stay at Stapleton Court as a companion to Iris.

Tremayne was anxious that they should come to his house, Trelawn, for Christmas, and bring Mrs. Humphreys with them.

He wanted his friend Jack Stapleton to be driven over one day; the change might benefit him, and it was an excuse to get Iris there.

"I want to give her a birthday party on the twenty-ninth," said he, "and she wouldn't enjoy it a bit if you were not there. I won't have a lot of people; merely a small congenial party. Oh yes, you must come, Jack, and bring Iris. She has never seen Trelawn."

They went on to talk that evening about the future

of Iris, and the declining fortunes of the Stapletons. Her father wanted to tell Iris how bad matters were, but Tremayne would not hear of it.

"Why on earth tell her?" he said. "It would worry her, and make her unhappy. Why do it before it is necessary? Things are all right now. There will be time enough later on."

"It's such a volcano," answered the invalid wearily. "My mother is old, you see, and she might die too. And then my poor Iris!"

Tremayne laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

"Haven't you promised her to me? And don't you know, therefore, that her future will be my care, and all my life will be given to making her happy? She shall have everything she wants, Jack, and I'll look after her, when she is my wife."

It was enough. "I am glad to think it may be so," said Jack Stapleton, "and I hope I may live to see it, but she is only seventeen, and it must be years yet—years, Tremayne!"

But Tremayne only smiled to himself.

Mrs. Stapleton was not so easily won over.

"Iris is too young for a house-party," she declared, "and her clothes are not suitable. Then, too, it will turn the child's head. She will not settle down here afterwards."

Tremayne became quite stern over it before he could make Mrs. Stapleton realize that her son had agreed, and that it was good for Iris to meet people, and see something else than Hendley.

Before the argument was finished, Iris herself came into the room and heard the last words of it.

"Oh, grandma, do say you'll go!" she cried delightedly. "I should so love it! And Mr. Tremayne will drive you all the way in his car. If daddy says we may go, we must, and it would be so lovely. Oh, grandma——"

"But, my dear child, you have no suitable frocks to wear," argued her grandmother. "Mr. Tremayne

will have other guests, and you would have to have nice clothes."

Tremayne frowned, and Iris looked at him appealingly. "That would not matter, would it?" she asked. "You wouldn't mind that? I'll make myself something."

"That doesn't matter a bit," he returned impatiently. "You know that perfectly well, Mrs. Stapleton. I want Iris to come to Trelawn, and see it," and he looked at the old lady as he spoke.

She understood and sighed.

"Then, of course, I must agree," she said quietly.

When they were alone, Iris began joyously to thank him.

"It will be lovely to stay in a rich house after this," she said. "I am so tired of being poor, and going without things."

Tremayne smiled at her. "What things would you like, Iris? Pretty clothes?"

"Yes, and pearls. I adore pearls, and lovely silk stockings, and pretty shoes, and I'd like a motor-car of my own to drive!"

"I wish I could give them all to you, but you see I can't now. Some day I hope you will have them all."

"I don't suppose I shall. I'd give anything for them, though."

"Anything? Even yourself?"

She laughed without looking at him, it was such a queer thing to say, but he was not even smiling and his eyes were black and steady.

"I'm not worth anything," she answered with a little shrug of her shoulders, "so that's not much of a bargain."

"You never know how that might be viewed and valued," he replied, but she did not understand.

"I think sometimes I would give anything for a good time, and to be rich and enjoy life," she said.

"But I don't know if it would be worth it. One never does know, I suppose."

"One can be happy as well as rich," smiled Tremayne, rather pleased at her attitude.

When Tremayne was at Stapleton Court he saw Cassillis every day; and it became an established fact that once at least Julian should go to the Court and pay his respects to Mrs. Stapleton; during which visits he and Iris avoided looking at each other, and barely spoke.

This had been rather an awkward week. Tremayne seemed somehow to be more *en evidence* than usual, and Iris only with difficulty succeeded in slipping out to meet Julian one evening after tea. "And I simply dare not stop more than ten minutes," she said discontentedly, "or the 'Grand Turk' will come out and raise the heavens! I wish you would come in, also, and then it would be a bit more lively. Anyway, you're coming to Trelawn when we go. Mr. Tremayne told daddy so."

"Yes, I am glad of that," answered Julian, for he, too, felt discontented that day, and had a heartache, but for what reason he did not know. "I shall be able to see you all the time then. This is pretty rotten."

They were standing in the doorway of the old summer-house at the bottom of the garden, for the meadow and wall had to be abandoned as too wet in the winter. Julian wanted to kiss her—he was not too young for that—but he dare not, principally because he was afraid that she would laugh at him; and Iris, though she wanted him to, was the tiniest bit afraid of encouraging him, and possibly kindling fires of which she had no knowledge. So they said good night without looking at each other, and Julian went back to the vicarage.

After dinner Tremayne came over and he and Cassillis had a long talk about Christmas, the next step in his training, and so on.

"Are you never homesick, Cassillis?" he asked him.

"No, never homesick," answered the boy. "Some-

times I long for the sea again, the fresh air and the salt smell. I'd like to climb the rocks, and sail in a storm and gale again : I suppose it's in my blood, but I don't want to go back, sir—in fact, I should hate it. I couldn't stand my old life again now."

"I am sure you could not. Do you still write to your parents?"

"No. They did not answer my last letter from Paris, and I did not think you were keen upon the correspondence being continued, so I have dropped it."

"You do not even write to your girl friend? I think you called her Mary. You ought to write and let her know how you are getting on."

Cassillis looked at him in astonishment, but after a minute the astonishment turned to a look of almost fear, as if he suddenly suspected the reason for this last suggestion.

"She did not answer my postcard either," he replied, "and you said you would prefer me not to write to her, sir."

"Yes, but I don't mind now," imperturbably. "In fact, I think it would be a nice thing if you did. The friendship of a good girl would be a help to you, and I think I would write if I were you, Cassillis, and see where she is."

But Cassillis did not reply. After a minute or two he began to ask about the future and Tremayne's plans for him; to talk about Trelawn, and what they would do there. Langley was to go as well, and they were looking forward tremendously to their visit. He was careful to keep away from the other subject, and succeeded so well that the unsuspecting Tremayne went back that evening with the impression that he had made a mistake, and that Cassillis was only a boy, and really wrapped up in his future career. Also that Iris was only a passing fancy, and that he had no serious thoughts in that direction.

In any case, they would be at Trelawn in less than

a month's time, and Cassillis would have left Hendley.

Cassillis wrote four letters to Mary Haig that night and tore them all up.

He tried writing "Dear old Mary," "Dear Mary," and "Dear Miss Haig," and other similar expressions of endearment. He tried to tell her about Hendley and Langley; that he was going to Italy soon, and to Trelawn for Christmas. Also about Tremayne and how splendid he was, but they all went wrong, and they all stopped at the same place. "I must tell you about my ripping girl friend," or "I must tell you about Miss Stapleton."

Langley came in, in the middle, and caught him at it.

"What on earth do you think you are doing?" he exclaimed with a grin. "Trying your hand at journalism, what?"

Cassillis explained, bidding him, irritably, to shut the door. "I can't write to her," he said in despair. "It seems years since I saw her, and she's so different. She wouldn't understand nor be interested, and I don't know what to write about."

Langley suddenly became serious. "No," he said quietly. "You are right. Because your interest is centred in one girl. She'd be interested right enough, but you are not! That's the truth. And you are a fool, Cassillis. You are only laying up trouble for yourself and Miss Stapleton, too."

"What do you mean?" demanded Cassillis.

Langley shrugged his shoulders. "You know well enough. I saw you saying 'Good-bye' to her yesterday, and it's not the first time either; and I don't mind telling you that your farewells are not impressive from a platonic point of view; in fact, yesterday's was distinctly tender."

"Rot!" replied Cassillis, but he coloured up all the same. "You don't understand, my dear Langley. Iris and I——"

"You have no right to call Miss Stapleton 'Iris,'

nor to meet her as you do, three and four times a week without——” He broke off suddenly for, as he was standing by the table, he caught sight of a letter almost beneath his hand.

It was written in a schoolish hand, with the address scrawled at the top, Stapleton Court, and the date.

“DEAREST JULIAN,—

Thanks awfully for yours. It will be ripping, and I’m looking forward frightfully to it——”

Cassillis snatched the letter away.

“I didn’t know I had left that out——” he said, but Langley had seen it, as he knew.

“My word!” said the prospective parson, for lack of stronger language, “but some one ought to look after that girl. She will get into a mess yet. Julian, you are a fool.”

Cassillis coldly inquired why? In his obstinacy he could not see why any man, even such as he, should not choose a girl in a higher social position than himself. Iris might have no money, but there was no doubt to both himself and Langley that she was above them socially.

“That’s just it,” Langley tried to explain, “but Miss Stapleton has not been brought up to be poor. She has been thoroughly spoilt, and when her father and her grandmother die they will not leave her a penny. Mr. Stapleton has a civil service pension, and the old lady has an annuity which dies with her. Do you seriously suppose that you could ever marry and keep Iris Stapleton?”

“I shall be rich some day,” said Julian with conviction, “and if she loved me she would wait. She is only seventeen and there is plenty of time.”

“She will soon be grown up, and it may be five, seven, or even ten years before you are rich. Do you want her to wait as long as that? Do you yourself want to wait until then to get married?”

"She would wait if she loved me," repeated Julian dreamily, and yet with the conviction of an older man, "Love is the only thing that matters in the world; money counts as nothing where love comes in."

"Idiot!" exclaimed Langley rudely. "Don't talk rot, nor fill her head with such rubbish. Iris Stapleton is essentially a girl who wants money and pretty things. So do you, and poverty would spoil you both. You leave her alone while there is time, and before you lose your head altogether. If you won't do it for your own sake, do it for hers. You are very attractive to women yourself, you know, and you might give her a few unhappy hours if you are not careful."

"I hope not," said Julian seriously. "But even that would be better for her than selling herself to the first rich man who asks her, wouldn't it? And that is what you are suggesting."

This time Langley smiled. "You are a fool," he told his friend, "a blind fool. You talk like a penny novelette!"

He said "Good night," and went out. Cassillis was at this stage an impossible idealist, and could not be argued with, but he questioned himself whether he should not tell Tremayne the way things were drifting before they went any further.

CHAPTER VI

TRELAWN was magnificent.

There were no weeds in the garden here from January to December. Every gravelled path was swept and rolled constantly, every bush was trimmed to perfect shape, every tree grew tidily, pruned with every autumn. The grass border, about twelve feet wide on either side of the long drive, was green as emerald, and smooth as velvet; there was a low, white-painted iron railing beyond the grass, and then meadows and woods. In the great open space before the white stone house were flower-beds full of wall-flowers ready for the spring; already the snowdrops were peeping through, and the little blue scillas and the glory of the snows were thrusting up their heads. While on one side of the house where the vast conservatories stretched, a mass of bloom could be seen through the polished glass, like rainbow colours in a winter's landscape.

The hall within was huge and square, lighted by a bow-window at the end, and a large skylight. There was a recess near the window and the fireplace, and here was the chosen place for tea.

The conventional Tremayne would have had tea in the drawing-room, under a lifelong impression that a drawing-room was the place for tea; but Iris said on the first day of her coming that if the house were hers the hall should be the place for tea. And thereupon and forthwith it was so!

Mrs. Humphreys played hostess; Mrs. Stapleton sat in a large chair and looked very stately and dignified.

Jack Stapleton lay on the specially prepared couch, with Iris sitting on the end of it, enjoying every moment.

The Italian tenor, who was to take over the training of Cassillis, was in London, and was coming down to Trelawn at the end of the week to test his voice. He knew Tremayne, and had agreed to make the trial, but not unnaturally, now that the time was getting near, Cassillis was acutely nervous, and it rather spoilt his first house-party.

He knew he could sing, but he had also learnt during this last year how little he knew.

Gambrioni was a great man, as great in his own country as John Higston was in England, and Cassillis knew that it was only Tremayne's influence which had persuaded him to take a raw pupil, and even so, that it would depend upon whether he thought favourably of his voice, and his prospects of success.

And if he did not, thought poor Cassillis, what would Tremayne do then? Would he send him back to Coastcliff, or give him up? And the worst of all was that Iris was there to witness his possible failure.

It was not only his career now, but if he failed it meant dashing to the ground all his other hopes and dreams as well.

Trelawn overawed him. It was so splendid, so old and so rich.

The pictures were worthy of a picture gallery, the glass and china of a museum, the silver was Old English, and the furniture worth a ransom.

In the music-room there was a reputed genuine Stradivarius violin, and a manuscript of Beethoven's. There were two grand pianos, and an electric organ.

It made Cassillis afraid, as one not born to such glories. He kept thinking of the four-roomed cottage at Coastcliff where his early life had been spent. He thought of the old couple who called themselves his parents, and how amazed they would be to see him here; and he wondered whether the

would have parted with him had they known to what he was going, and that it had been Tremayne's intention to adopt him like this.

It was not a very gay week, for the Stapletons were quiet people, and Tremayne was music mad. He made Cassillis spend half his day in the music-room practising certain songs likely to please the famous singer when he came down, and Julian found that he scarcely saw Iris, and never had an opportunity to talk to her alone. They met at meals, and in the evenings, but only when all the party was present, and Iris was sensible enough to take very little notice of him.

She liked this boy, liked being under the same roof with him, and teasing and flirting with him when Tremayne was looking the other way, but she knew that she was the guest of honour, that the party had been planned for her, and that she was thoroughly enjoying being made a fuss of for the first time in her life.

Julian was charming, but he was only a boy at the beginning of his career, and she liked the lovely things which Tremayne gave her.

Her birthday fell on the twenty-ninth. It was a cold wintry day, with sleet and snow, and after a morning out in it, the "youngsters," as Tremayne called them, refused to go out again.

There was a dinner-party in the evening in Iris's honour, but in the afternoon when Tremayne was engaged elsewhere, she had no objection to an hour with Cassillis in a deep recess in the hall, where half hidden by the heavy curtains they could be alone, and he could regain some of the confidence in himself that he used to have at Hendley.

They were sitting very close, the boy's fair head almost touching the girl's, when Tremayne came along and saw them before they had time to spring apart.

His lips set in a straight line, and he frowned.

"I was looking for you, Iris," he said reprovingly. "I wanted you."

Cassillis stood up awkwardly, and flushed nervously. He did not speak, but Iris said lightly:

"Of course, what is it? Shall I come? Julian was just going to practise, and I was trying to persuade him to let me come and listen."

"Then I'm afraid he wouldn't get much work done," answered Tremayne dryly. "Yes, I wanted you. Come with me."

She got up and slipped her hand through his arm with the same carelessness that she showed towards Cassillis. She did not even excuse herself to him as they moved away. Tremayne said:

"You have an hour before tea, Cassillis. Be quick and go now; there is no one in the music-room." Then, as they went along, he added:

"I wish you would not disturb Cassillis. You distract his thoughts and he must work. He is not fledged yet. You really must leave him alone, Iris."

Iris pulled a face and did not answer. They went upstairs, and he took her into a part of the house she had not seen before.

A faint smell of lavender greeted her as he unlocked the door and she passed into the rooms.

"What a gorgeous room," she exclaimed. "And what a view! Why, this is the best part of Trelawn, isn't it?"

"Is it? These are my mother's rooms, and I thought you would like to see them. She died years ago, not here, but in London, and they are just as she left them."

Iris stood and looked round. The walls and furniture of the sitting-room were all white and there were curtains and a moss green carpet to match. From the wide bay-window there was a view of the rose gardens and paddock, and beyond that, the river and the sunset.

A door led into the bedroom which was decorated

in the same way—all white and green, even to the frames of the old-world pictures on the walls.

"Perfectly lovely!" murmured the girl rapturously. "And another room? What a jolly suite! But how sad to think they are never used, and I don't suppose many people even see them."

"No, your grandmother has been here, but she knew my mother. That door? That leads into my room, but it's locked at present. That dressing-room would make an excellent bathroom. They were not so particular about bathrooms in my mother's day, but I must have it made into one."

"What on earth for?"—in surprise—"if no one ever uses these rooms. Would they use them then?"

"I hope they will be occupied some day," smiled Tremayne quietly. "My wife will have them."

"Your wife!" Iris stared at him in astonishment, but he was unlocking a writing table just then, and did not take any notice.

"You will never get married, will you?" she asked, amused.

"I hope so, some day," he looked up. "Why should I not get married, pray?"

"You don't seem the sort of man to do so. You've always seemed too old."

His smile faded. "I am only thirty-eight. Is that old?"

"It sounds so. Why, daddy is only forty-four; not much older and his hair is nearly white."

She was sorry then, and apologized prettily.

"I shouldn't have said that, please forgive me. Of course daddy's hair is white because he is always ill."

"What does it matter? Don't be sorry, my dear child," he returned impatiently, annoyed with himself for having felt it so much. "Truth is always preferable to flattery, but I do not think, all the same, I look as old as your father. My hair is not even grey. But you are such a child yourself that I

suppose we all appear old. You are eighteen to-day, are you not?"

"Yes, and grown up at last." Iris gazed at herself admiringly in a long mirror, and told him about a new dress which Mrs. Humphreys had made for her to wear at the dinner-party that night.

She was quite excited at the prospect of it, and of putting up her hair. Then her attention was attracted by the contents of what she had thought was a drawer in the writing table, but which contained an assortment of Tremayne's mother's jewels, which he was anxious to show her.

"I expect you like pretty things like these," he said. "All girls do, and my mother had some very pretty jewels."

Iris had never seen such things in her life, and had to try them all on in front of the mirror, to his amusement.

He laughed at her decked in diamonds and emeralds. "They are much too old for you," he told her, "and you are too fair. Try the pearls. You said you adored pearls."

There was a long chain, also a treble row, with a diamond clasp. He took it up and put it round her throat.

"That suits you better—will you please me by accepting those as a birthday gift?"

His voice held something she did not understand, but she did not worry about it in her astonishment.

"The pearls! You cannot mean it, Mr. Tremayne!"

"I do. I want you to have them, and wear them with your new dress this evening."

"But—will grandmama let me have them? And how can you want to part with them when they belonged to your mother?"

"I am only parting with them to you. I should not give them to any one else. And now, if you can tear yourself away from all these things, we must go down to tea."

She began to thank him in halting words, as if she guessed some of the feelings which prompted him, but he stopped her. He did not want gratitude, and Iris was a temptation when she put off her childish ways and looked at him with her violet eyes.

He took the pearls from her and again fastened them round her throat. At that moment he would have given years of his life to have taken her in his arms and kissed her, not as the child he had always known but as the woman she was to be.

But Tremayne was thirty-eight, and not to be tempted. He let her go and turned to replace the rest of the jewels.

Iris went through the rooms again.

"They are very beautiful," she said when she came back to him. "It's a beautiful house; much more beautiful than ours."

"You like it as much?" he asked. "Would you like to live here? That is, of course, if by any chance you had to leave Stapleton Court."

"I might. What a funny thing to say. I should hate to leave home, of course."

"But you could love Trelawn?"

"I don't think I should love it as much as home, but it's awfully jolly. Shall we go down again now?"

Tremayne looked at her for a moment, lost in thought; then with a little sigh, he answered, "Yes, come along," and followed her.

* * * * *

"Of course you are spoiling the child, Geoffrey," murmured Mrs. Stapleton at tea to her host. "First you give her those beautiful furs, and now the pearls! She will never settle down again at home after all this."

Tremayne merely smiled. "And why should I not spoil her?" he answered. "Surely I have more right and reason to do so than any one else has. And Iris is no longer a child. You and Jack forget the fact. She is eighteen and almost a woman."

CHAPTER VII

CASSILLIS was in the depths of depression after that. Iris was just what Langley had said, he decided. She loved Trelawn because it was luxurious, she loved the furs and pearls that Tremayne had given her, and she would never be satisfied either with a poor man, or to wait years for a fortune. She was sweet to him in her careless girlish way, but she was just as sweet to the other men, which from his point of view was distinctly disconcerting.

He suffered his first heartache before the week was out, and wished himself far away.

"What is the matter with that boy, Tremayne?" asked Jack Stapleton one day, observing Cassillis going out alone. "Is he homesick, or in love?"

Tremayne laughed. "Neither," he returned. "He is of an unsociable disposition, I imagine, and perhaps he feels a little out of place. I dare say, also, he is nervous about his voice. He will be all right when the test is over."

But there again he was wrong. Cassillis was not nervous when the time came and the famous Italian was actually in the house. He went down to the music-room with Tremayne and Langley and passed through the ordeal with spartan calm.

And to make a long story short, it was in every way successful. After one or two not very pleasing selections chosen by Tremayne, Cassillis elected to sing Gounod's famous "Ave Maria," and that won the day.

Within an hour they had arranged for him to go to

Rome at the beginning of March, allowing him about six weeks in which to learn the Italian's method from one of his former pupils in London.

Cassillis was radiant. He saw his feet on the first rung of the ladder, and himself climbing up to fame and wealth. He escaped as soon as he could, and rushed to tell Iris the glad news before Tremayne came and carried her away, as he usually did when he found them together.

Iris was in the hall. She had been listening, with the others of the house-party, outside the door of the music-room, and had waited for him, knowing that he would come to find her. Together they went down to the quiet library, her arm slipped through his, while she told him how "splendid" she thought he was.

"And now you know I am going to be a success, will you wait for me, Iris?" he asked as they sat close together on the wide leather couch. "And I will bring my laurels home to you."

"Of course I will. We shall all be tremendously proud of you, but oh, I hope, Julian, you will not grow fat like the Italian man. He is so very fat, and I don't like fat people!"

Cassillis would not laugh or see the joke.

"I don't want them all to be proud of me," he replied, "I just want you. I'm going to work for you—and, of course, Mr. Tremayne," he added. "Iris, promise me you will wait? We are both young——"

Iris felt a trifle uneasy. She liked him, of course, to hold her hands and to be such a devoted young lover, but she was conscious all the same that Tremayne would not approve of this decidedly intimate conversation if he knew of it, and she did not want to promise anything.

"What are you going to do next?" she asked, evading his question. "I suppose you won't come back to Hendley?"

"Only to get my things; they're still at the vicarage. Mr. Tremayne is taking me back to London

with him until I go to Rome. I expect that will be in about six weeks' time, but of course I'll come and see you first. I must do that. Do you know, Iris, I like you better in Hendley than here."

"Do you? Why?"

"You seem to belong to me there, at least to the same world. Here you seem right away above me, and as if I can never reach you."

Iris smiled with a little vanity; but she was enjoying his worship.

"You are so beautiful," he said under his breath, "and I adore you!"

"Oh, don't! Don't be too adoring, it's so slow. Admire me, if you like. I love to think you believe me pretty, but——"

She tilted her head back to look into his blue eyes, so near her own, and he caught her in his arms. She laughed, and he kissed her golden hair. That was slow too, so she turned her head, and the invitation was obvious. His lips sought hers longingly, and he kissed her for the first time.

They were little more than children, and it was just as it began between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere; "as yet no sin was dreamed," but the thing was done. "Come back to Hendley," she begged. And he protested, "I will, indeed I will!"

There was a step behind them, and they sprang apart.

"You had better come into the hall, both of you," said Langley's voice. "Mr. Tremayne is asking for you, Miss Stapleton. Come along, Cassillis——" and they sprang up at once.

They went back into the hall, Iris unblushingly chattering to Langley. Tremayne was waiting impatiently there, and for once he looked quite out of temper.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "I wish you would not run away like this, Iris."

She veiled her eyes. "We were in the library, were

we not, Mr. Langley ? ” and her eyes suddenly challenged him. Cassillis looked desperately embarrassed, but he did not interrupt, and Langley answered evasively, after a minute’s pause :

“ Congratulating our new impresario.”

A little later on that evening, however, he met Tremayne alone, and Langley took the opportunity to say quite casually :

“ Cassillis is not coming back to Hendley, is he, sir ? ”

“ Only to fetch his things,” answered Tremayne. “ I am going to keep him with me in town until Signor Gambriani sends for him. He will have to start his lessons next week, and work hard. Do you want him to come to Hendley ? You will not be there, will you ? ”

Langley said he would not, and did not answer the other question.

“ I think it will do him good to get away and start work,” he said. “ Perhaps he will run down and see me before he goes to Italy.”

CHAPTER VIII

FROM Trelawn, after ten days there, Cassillis went back with Tremayne to town and the Hotel Cimric again, a very different being from the boy who had been there ten months ago.

Gambrioni had returned to Rome, and for six weeks Cassillis worked in London with his pupil. A very hard six weeks it was, too, the hardest the boy had as yet experienced. And though Tremayne was immensely pleased with his progress, he grew rather anxious about the boy's health.

Cassillis put his soul into it, and appeared to have no other thought than his work, but he drooped at the finish and wilted like a wild flower in a hot-house. When his day was done, he was too fagged to do anything else, and therefore had no recreation.

At the end of the fifth week there was some hitch in the arrangements and the ever-impatient Tremayne suddenly decided to go himself to Italy, and leave Julian to follow.

The boy was lying in a deep chair that evening when the decision was made. He looked white and tired, so much so that the elder man was forced to wonder whether care for his health ought not to play a larger part in his life, and whether Julian might not wear himself out too soon; in fact, before he really began.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked him. "Are you working too hard? Can't you stand work, Julian?"

"I shall be all right when I get away," answered

Julian evasively. "It's just the waiting, that's all."

Tremayne did not look as if he believed it.

"I think it would do you good to go down to Hendley for the week-end," he remarked. "I will write to the vicar. You want country air, and you can't do too much practising there."

He was busy writing at the time and ~~did not~~ look up, or he would have been amazed at the sudden flash of joy which lit up Julian's face. There was no reply, however.

"Would you like to do that?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, I should. I can cyclé over to Oxford then and see Langley."

"Very well, then. We will consider that settled. And if I can't get back, I will wire to you and to March"—March was his man-servant—"and you can come out to me. I will leave March behind just in case I should have to do this. I do not think you had better come alone, and remember, Julian, that if you go out in town at night after I have gone, you had better take March with you. I want you to keep well, and be careful of yourself now."

Julian said, "Yes, sir, of course I will," but he did not look once at his guardian.

* * * * *

So Tremayne went to Rome, and that same afternoon Cassillis went down to Hendley.

And Tremayne did not know that he wrote to Iris and told her that he was coming, and asked her to meet him at the usual spot.

The February weather was mild, with a warm south wind. In fact it was more like April in the Thames valley.

Iris and Cassillis were able to meet by the old wall and enjoy a walk through the fields as they used to do. It was wet, but they did not worry about that. Only this time there was something wrong.

Iris was older, for one thing; she was growing up and ahead of him, and—she had missed him.

They tried to put the clock back and be young and foolish as they had been before, but it could not be done, and they soon found it out. Julian would not laugh—could not, in fact—and even Iris had a heart-ache which she did not understand nor like.

“When are you going to Italy,” she asked, “soon?”

“Any day now,” he answered, “but I expect it will be in about a week. Mr. Tremayne may return, but if not I shall go out to him.”

“Will you come back in the summer?”

“No.”

“Nor at Christmas?”

He shook his head. “No, he doesn’t want me to come back at all for three years——”

There was a long pause. Iris had nothing to say, and Julian leaned on the wall and looked thoroughly wretched.

“Don’t you want to go?” she asked then.

“Yes, of course I do—I’m going to work hard and become famous. Of course I want to go, but——”

“You don’t look like it. You look awfully miserable.”

He looked up, urged by an uncontrollable impulse.

“I know,” he said honestly, “because I’m in love with you, and I hate leaving you. I am afraid you won’t wait for me, and—it may be years before I can come back——”

“But I will wait.” She put her arms round him, and held him.

“You say so now,” said Julian in a low voice, “but your father may want you to marry a rich man.”

“There is no rich man, and daddy will never part with me while he lives.”

“You won’t tell him about me?”

“Julian, I can’t. He’d say I am too young, and they would stop my seeing you or writing to you. And I hate to worry him when he is ill.”

"You don't love me, that's it!"—dejectedly.
"If you did——"

Iris slipped off the wall. "I do, I do!"—and he caught her in his arms and held her fast.

"Iris, will you marry me before I go, will you dare?"

He took her breath away. "It isn't possible!"

"Will you, if it is? I can get a special licence, I know all about it; we could go into Oxford one day from here and be married. If I get the licence, will you, Iris?"

Iris was young and romantic; untaught, and in love for the first time in her life. An elopement—a wedding-ring on a chain round her neck, like the heroine of a novel—how lovely!

"Mr. Tremayne is abroad, so there is no one to stop us. Iris, do say yes, and then I shall have something to work for, something definite, and someone to come home to. I shall not be afraid of losing you then, or of your marrying another man. Oh, Iris, I love you so!"

She smiled, and nestled closer.

"I'd love to. I love you awfully. Yes, why not? We will, but can it be done? Do you know if it can, Julian, and when?"

"At once. I shall get the licence on Monday. I shall have to make out that we are both of age, but it will be all right, and I have plenty of money."

Iris laughed excitedly, and they made hasty plans, as absurd as they were delightful. They arranged to meet in Oxford on Tuesday morning. Iris was to cycle, and he was to go direct by train from London. And Iris said, in her usual slang:

"It will be a lark!"

She could picture, in her innocent mind, Tremayne's dismay when in the time to come he found it out. She had absolutely no suspicion of his own intentions, and she was sure that her father would only laugh. He always had laughed at her many escapades, even when her grandmother had been cross. But in this

case, when it could not be undone, she was sure that even grandmanma would be practical and help. And she thought how romantic it would be. Julian was such a nice boy, so frightfully nice-looking, and of course some day he would be very great and famous, and they would be delighted at what she had done.

"I shall not mind about leaving you half so much if we are married," he said, as innocent as herself. "I shall be sure of you then."

* * * * *

On the Sunday Cassillis went to tea at Stapleton Court.

And afterwards, when the vicar and his wife had gone out to supper after evensong, and Mrs. Stapleton was reading to her son, the two young people met in the dark of the early spring evening, down at the old wall.

"Where shall we go?" he asked, as he helped her down, "the fields are very wet, and the summer-house is so jolly uncomfortable."

"So near the house, too," returned Iris. "Let's go across the fields, anyhow."

It was the same spot where she had first met him, and Iris knew every bit of it. She led him across a couple of fields, and then, because the rain was falling, a soft warm spring drizzle, she suggested sheltering in a dry barn at the end of the second field.

"We can make some more plans for Tuesday there," she said.

Cassillis would have followed her in that hour to the end of the world, and a barn was not nearly so far. They went inside, through the open door, and up the steep ladder. It was a sweet-smelling nest and they were very safe from any discovery here.

But they did not make any plans. Iris was very quiet. She sat curled up, her chin on her hands, while he lay at her feet, his head against her rough coat.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked at last, "you are awfully quiet, Julian."

"Just about you," he answered. "I think you are the most beautiful thing in all the world, and I love you so. I am thinking about Tuesday, and wishing it were to-morrow or to-night. I wish it were done, don't you? You promise you will marry me, don't you, Iris?"

She promised readily at that minute, and believed that she meant it.

"Shall we be able to get away for the day, do you think?"

"If I don't come back till evening they can't come and fetch me, can they? They won't know where I am."

"But you will have to come back at night."

In the darkness she blushed, though she laughed.

"Of course. We shall have to wait for our honeymoon, Julian."

He caught her close, and they clung together. He kissed her again and again, till she was breathless.

"I'm simply mad with love for you," he told her, losing in his passion all eloquence of speech. "I did not know it would be like this. I never knew."

He had thought of love before, talked of it with Mary, and even with Langley, but that had been different. This flood had come upon him unawares. He was young, but not the boy Tremayne imagined him to be, and in many ways he was old. His extraordinary, untraceable, artistic temperament was a snare which neither he, nor Iris, nor Tremayne guessed at.

The smell of the coming spring and the awakening earth crept up to them on their bed of hay; youth called to youth, and mate called to mate. Instinct and nature awoke and told the girl and boy ~~what~~ neither parent nor guardian had thought fit to tell them.

They were going to be married on Tuesday, that

was the day after to-morrow. It was all arranged now, and then they would be able to do whatever they liked, but there was one thing they would not have, and that was their honeymoon.

Iris clung closer and kissed him.

"Oh, Julian, you are a dear," she said like a little girl, "and isn't everything lovely!"

* * * * *

The wind stirred in the trees, and somewhere a night owl called to its mate—and the answer came from afar.

Time crept on, but the boy and girl took no heed of it. There was no time to them—nothing but each other.

* * * * *

It was nearly midnight when Iris let herself into the house again. They were all in bed, and she slipped noiselessly through the door and gained her own room unnoticed.

* * * * *

In the morning Cassillis went back to town. He was in the seventh heaven of bliss, and set about getting the special licence at once without more ado.

He did get it, too, never knowing how it was managed; giving his age as twenty-one, and spending almost all the money in his possession on it. Then he wrote to Iris and told her, repeating the arrangement which they had made personally, to meet him at the station at Oxford on Tuesday morning.

He was staying at the Hotel Cimric, in Tremayne's rooms (kept like a flat for him when required), and the indispensable March was there, too. It was he who brought in a letter late that evening to Julian as he was practising. A scribble in his beloved Iris's writing:—

"DEAREST JULIAN,—

"I can't come to-morrow. Daddy is dreadfully ill, and I daren't leave the house for long. He wants

me all the time. I will let you know the very first day I can get away—I expect it will be at the end of the week if he is better.

“My best love to you,

“Your own IRIS.”

This was upsetting. Julian had counted on to-morrow; he did not think that even her father ought to have kept Iris away now, and he hated the very thought of a hitch. Besides, Tremayne might come back!

He slept badly and could settle to nothing next day, finally deciding to go down anyway to Hendley on the Wednesday and see Iris. He thought perhaps that he could persuade her to come up on Thursday, if he made an appointment at the Registrar's, and there need be no waiting. They must be married now—they must!

He went out in the afternoon but he was utterly wretched, and soon returned to a lonely dinner, which he did not eat. And then as he sat at coffee, March, the man-servant, brought a telegram for him.

“Leave London to-morrow for Rome, according to instructions. Will meet you on arrival.

“TREMAYNE.”

The hotel lounge went round, and Cassillis felt faint and dizzy. He could not go to-morrow. He must wait and see Iris.

“Mr. Tremayne has wired also to me,” March was saying. “I am to accompany you, sir. We leave Charing Cross for Paris at 2.20. I have been several times before with my master, and know the trains and routes. Shall I pack for you, sir?”

“Yes, please do,” answered Cassillis, too dazed to care, “you will do it better than I.”

It was a way of getting rid of the man, who was staring at him rather in wonder. Of course he would

have to go, and equally he could not go. HE COULD NOT GO.

But Tremayne would not wait, and Julian was not his own master. He was Tremayne's, body and soul, and he must go.

He must go to-morrow, and for three years !

He wrote an impassioned appeal to Iris to come up to town in the morning and marry him, but he had no hope that she would or could manage it, unless she told her father, and that she would not do.

So he could but wait, helpless and hopeless, the night through, and while the morning passed.

He was too young and inexperienced to realize fully what he had done, but his instinctive sense of honour condemned him, and apart from that he was acutely in love for the first time, and he dreaded the long separation ahead.

He knew that they would not be allowed to correspond, and he would not be allowed to come home. And he wanted Iris with all his heart.

Before lunch there was a reply to his letter—a brief telegram.

“Julian dear, I can't. We must wait.

“IRIS.”

That dashed his last hope to the ground.

It was no use his going to Hendley, no use wiring, even if there had been time. And he simply did not dare to decline to obey instructions and not go. He knew Tremayne sufficiently well by now to guess what he would be like if he were disobeyed, and he realized that he was beholden to him for everything in life.

And perhaps, also, he hardly understood. So he went to Rome as arranged.

CHAPTER IX

EIGHTEEN months later Jack Stapleton died. Tremayne came to Stapleton Court in June to ask her father's consent to his speaking of marriage to Iris ; but his friend was failing so fast in health that he was forced to agree to postpone all mention of it, and make no suggestion which would part father and daughter before it was necessary.

Iris had grown up in the interval, but this one thing she had not learnt. She still regarded Tremayne as her father's friend and her future guardian. She had even, on more than one occasion, thought of telling him about Julian Cassillis, but it stopped there because Iris had found out long ago that Tremayne did not care to hear about their friendship.

He and her grandmother had found that she was writing to Rome, and the correspondence had been brought to an abrupt finish. Since then she had heard practically nothing and asking brought forth only the briefest of replies.

* * * * *

True to his procrastinating habits to the end, Jack Stapleton had said nothing to Iris either about their financial position or about Tremayne, although the latter had urged him to do so, and save his daughter the added shock after his death of learning the actual position, and that there would be barely sufficient money for her and her grandmother to live upon.

He waited until the doctor told him that it could only be a matter of hours. Then he sent for her.

It was September, and Iris came in a summer dress,

anxious to know what she could do for him, saddened to think that he could not join her in the sunshine and the garden, and ready to do anything that he asked to make him happy.

She was very pretty, and her father did not like his task, and yet the thought of Iris working for her living in a hard world was much worse; and with Tremayne he knew she would never want for anything.

"But I shall have to work," said Iris calmly, when she understood the position. "What else can I do? As for grandmamma, Mr. Tremayne will look after her, both for your sake and her own. You know he will."

"Tremayne has done too much already, with no reward," answered her father. "You just think he has been good, but you have no idea to what extent, nor why it has been done."

"He is a friend of yours, he loves you," replied Iris. "He has often told me so. He says you and he have been like brothers."

"It has not been only for that. Tremayne wants you, and it has all been done for you, Iris."

She did not understand, even then, because such an absurd proposition had never entered her head.

"Tremayne wants to marry you," he said. "You are not a little girl any longer, but a woman."

She laughed at that. "What nonsense! Why, he is old!"

"He is not old, and he has always meant to marry you ever since you were a little girl. Everything has been done to that end, and that is why I have let him do it. I knew he would get his reward some day."

Iris got up suddenly. "Did Mr. Tremayne say this to you, daddy? Or are you just imagining it?"

"He has said it many times. He would have said it to you long ago, but I would not let him. I wanted to keep you as long as possible. He wanted to tell you in June, but I begged him not to do so."

Iris stared at him with eyes like saucers. "But it's ridiculous! I have never thought of him except as a guardian, and he is too old."

Jack Stapleton was patient. He explained at length that it was not only a matter of honour, but the only way out, and he put it plainly to Iris how much Tremayne could give her, and that she would have nothing to complain of.

"He wants to buy me, then," she said in rather a low tone. "That is what it amounts to. I think he might have told me so, and not left it to you. I am not a child, and I should have understood. But it would be like living in church, he is so good."

"He is good. He is an honourable man, and will make you a good husband. You will be quite safe with him, and he will never let you work—he has promised me that."

Iris stared out of the window blankly. "Of course it is impossible—I am sorry, but I couldn't possibly marry Mr. Tremayne."

"It is not impossible," he returned. "You must do it. I have promised you to him."

It was a fight then; for she knew that she ought to tell her father now, and give him the reason why she could not marry Tremayne, but since that was out of the question, she had to fight on the ground that she did not love him.

"I couldn't marry a man I didn't love a bit. It's a horrid idea. Let me appeal to him. He will not want me to when I tell him I do not care for him. And he will not let grandmamma suffer because of me. He is much too generous."

"I have promised you to Tremayne," said her father obstinately. "And men are not generous when they want a thing like this. You must make up your mind to it, Iris. And I must know before I—go. You must promise me."

The nurse came in then, alarmed at the patient's excitement. She told Iris that she must give in to him,

whatever it was, and frightened at his exhaustion and pallor, the girl put her feelings on one side for the moment.

She could tell Tremayne another time all about it, but just now her father must be quietened.

She promised, her hand in his.

"And a Stapleton never breaks his word," he said.

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours later Tremayne arrived from Rome.

It was late at night, and he went straight upstairs into his friend's room, without even waiting to take off his big storm-coat. It was only a question of hours now.

He went into the room and across to the bed.

"I am here, Jack," he said in his deep voice.

"I have come to you."

Jack Stapleton opened his eyes and smiled.

"I have been waiting for you." He held out his hand. "I wanted to thank you for all you have done for us; you have been the best friend a man ever had, Tremayne, and I want to give you—Iris."

"I will make her as happy as the day is long," said Tremayne solemnly. "I will love her all my life, and she shall never need a friend while I live. Neither will I ever let her work. Have you told her, Jack?"

"I have told her, and she is willing."

He asked the nurse to fetch her to say good night, and Iris came from her room, wearing a white dressing-gown, her hair a waving mass over her shoulders. She looked pale and frightened, her face small and thin, and Tremayne's heart ached for all she had been through, and must go through, before it came to his turn to make things easy for her.

"I have come to say good night, daddy; you wanted me——" she began, and then she saw that her father was not alone, and stopped, the colour surging over her face in a crimson wave.

Tremayne was standing up. "How are you, Iris?"

he said, briefly, holding out his hand, but when she put hers into it she did not look at him, but past him to her father.

He smiled at her. "Tremayne is going to look after you, Iris," he said. "I am sure you will be happy ——" His one hand groped for hers and the other for Tremayne's. He joined them together across his bed as they stood on either side.

"That's all right," he sighed. "That is off my mind."

Iris was looking down, and she shut her eyes. It seemed to her that there was a ghost in the room, standing at the foot of the bed, staring at her with brilliant eyes—the ghost of Julian Cassillis, who had loved and trusted her.

"Now run along, little girl, and go to bed," said her father, "and good night."

* * * * *

He did not speak again. When the first crimson streaks of dawn crossed the sky, and the first bird twittered in the branches of the tree without his window, he died.

CHAPTER X

AFTER his long hurried journey, and his night vigil, Tremayne slept most of the next day, and did not see Iris at all except at meals.

She avoided him, and he knew that she was busy with her mourning and the many flowers, and he did not attempt conversation.

It was only after the funeral, when they were back in the house, that he had time to think of that which must be said between them.

There was little business to attend to, for everything was in perfect order, and Mrs. Stapleton had few worries. They had long known that they would have to leave the home when Jack Stapleton died, and it had been practically settled, with Tremayne's assistance, that it should be let, and Iris and her grandmother should go to a small house on the South Coast where the old lady could live her remaining years in the sunshine.

Tremayne was to attend to everything, not only as friend, but as a future member of the family.

He stayed therefore a few days, and on the last afternoon he went in search of Iris.

It was growing dark, and outside the rain was falling. He found her in the dining-room sitting near a hastily lit and badly smoking fire, sewing black material into a dress. She was absorbed in her task, but as the door opened and she saw who it was, she started up, poised for flight like a startled deer. The colour rushed to her face, and she edged away.

"Put your work down a minute, Iris, I want to

speak to you," he said, and then, hurt by her shrinking expression, "oh, my dear child, don't make an ogre of me and be frightened of me all at once. I am not going to say anything to you just yet; I only wish to know if your father made my wishes clear to you?"

"Quite," replied Iris, bending her head over her work as if that was all that mattered.

"And you understood?"

"Yes, but please don't talk to me about it now. Let me have a little longer."

Tremayne touched her hand. It was ice cold, and trembled beneath his.

"You can't see to sew," he said, "and this room is very cold. What are you doing, making a dress? Oh, the folly of convention! And I could buy you everything you could want. I would not let you do this sort of thing, Iris."

Still she did not speak, nor look up, and he rose with a sigh.

"I am leaving in the morning," he said. "You will be here for another two months. Then you and grandmamma are going to Bournemouth, and this house is to be let. I cannot prevent your leaving as things are—I wish I could—but I hope it will not be for long. I shall come back before you go, and in the meantime, Iris, I want you to think over what your father said to you, and give me your answer then. Will you, Iris?"

She looked up and met his eyes. They were kind, dark, still and clear. She did not guess in her innocence what lay beneath such pools, but she was wise enough to know that it was no use trying to escape just now, and that here was a man ready to befriend her. Later on, she could tell him—and ask his help.

She said two or three words of grateful thanks in a low voice, and no more.

* * * * *

It was a sunny November day when he returned. Iris never forgot it; the warm sunny garden, where

they walked down by the water-lily pond; the last asters blooming in the beds, the last rose on the wall, and the grey haze on the hills. It remained with her all her life.

Tremayne was very direct. He had come down the night before, and in the morning he asked her to come for a walk round the gardens. They were leaving the old place in a few days, and it was the last time, possibly for years, that he would see it.

When they came to the water-lily pond, he stopped and asked her:

"Well? What answer are you going to give me?"

Iris looked frightened to death. "Oh, please, must we talk about it?" she asked imploringly. "I wish you would not, and it's no use."

"What on earth do you mean: it's no use?" He looked a little stern then. "Do you mean you don't want to marry me? Your father told you that it was my wish, did he not?"

She said "Yes. But I could not believe it. I don't believe it now. You have never hinted at such a thing."

"And is that any reason why you should look like a frightened rabbit? I am not suggesting you should marry me to-morrow by special licence"—Iris winced at the reminder—"nor indeed this year. But some day you will, won't you? You intend to get married some time, don't you? So you need not look as if I am proposing to cut your head off."

Iris tried to smile; tried, too, very lamely, to explain that she did not want to be married, and preferred her present life.

He only smiled at that. "Your father wished you to marry me. And you will have a much better time as my wife than you have now. I can make you very happy, Iris. You love pretty things, and luxury. You would like to travel, would you not? and have a car of your own, and pretty things to wear, and jewels? You once told me, do you remem-

ber, that you would give anything, even yourself, for these things, and you will have them all if you will marry me."

She laughed a little. It was certainly tempting, and she was very young.

"Fancy your remembering all that nonsense! Of course I should like all that, but——"

"But what? I could not give them to you unless you were my wife."

"I was going to say, doesn't it seem rather like buying me?"

Tremayne drew his brows together—that hurt a little.

"Perhaps, but I do not want to buy you. Can you give me nothing in return—couldn't you ever care a little for me?"

"I am very fond of you, but that isn't the same, is it? Would you be satisfied with what I could give you?"

"I should hope to make it more if it were not enough. Don't you think you would be happy at Trelawn with me, in those pretty rooms I showed you?"

Iris regarded him with a detached look. "Your mother's rooms. Should I have them? And is that why you gave me the pearls?"

"Not exactly. I should possibly have given you pearls anyway, but, of course, not my mother's. I would take you round the world, Iris, if you would like to travel——"

"And let me stay in London?"

"Half the year if you wish."

She sat down on the marble rim of the pond, and looked down into the water. He was tempting her, and she was also afraid to refuse him outright. She could have to give him a reason, and that she dare not. But oh, if only there had been no one else, and no memories!

"But you know people who get married don't do

these things," she said without looking up. "They seem to me to stay at home and have lots of children. I don't want children, I detest them!"

Tremayne looked as shocked as he felt.

"My dear child, don't talk nonsense," he replied quickly. "You are little more than a child yourself, and you know nothing about such things. I want to give you a good time, take you away, and give you all the things you have missed. Come along now, say yes, and let us know where we are."

She looked up then, with an odd look in her eyes.

"Do you really want me, Mr. Tremayne, whether I—love you or not?"

"Yes. I will teach you to love me while we wait. I do not want you to marry me until next summer. I want you to be engaged to me, and I will chance the rest."

She turned back to the water, her thoughts far away in Rome. She was thinking of Cassillis, and his impetuous wooing. He could not wait, and "chance it"; he had wanted her then, to make sure of her, and she—God help her—she understood! But that was not love, not to her, and she had known it from that night to this day. It was passion and youth, no more. Cassillis was a boy. Tremayne was a man, twenty years older than herself, and a man of the world. Was he, she asked herself, so good a man that she could manage him and protect herself and her secret?

There seemed no loophole for escape. She dare not tell, and nothing but the truth would satisfy him.

There was another thing, too; it was all very well being promised to a man whom one had not seen for nearly two years, and had not even heard from, nor written to, for eighteen months, but it was slow. And if she were engaged to Tremayne, Iris knew that her life would be a much pleasanter affair than it had ever been before.

She would travel at his expense, and that alone was

worth considering, for otherwise it would mean that she would have to live with her grandmother in the new little house at Bournemouth all the winter.

"If you will give me until next summer——" she began, and then frightened suddenly, "but I don't love you," she repeated in such a childish way that he laughed a little tenderly.

"You will learn, you are very young, you know, but once my ring is on your finger—give me your hand."

He slipped the big half hoop of diamonds on to her third finger.

"Fits well, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it's beautiful. How did you know it would fit? And how did you know I should agree? You arranged it all beforehand."

"I think it has arranged itself. It was your father's last wish, and you could scarcely say 'No.' And why should you?"

"But supposing I had said 'No.' What—what would you have done then?"

"Waited a little, and then asked you again—and again until you made up your mind."

"You meant to have me then?"

"Yes," rather sternly. "I have always meant to have you."

"But if there had been another man, if I had wanted to marry some one else, what would you have done then?"

"That depends upon the man, and other things. I am your guardian, and you are under age. I should not let another man look at you unless I approved of him and under the circumstances naturally I should not. So that there could be no other man. And now I will take care there is not." He smiled at her. "And you like your ring? Well, then, are you not going to thank me for it?"

She looked at him, and caught her breath.

"Kiss me!" he commanded, and held out his arms to her, but Iris shivered and shrank away.

"I don't like being kissed—I didn't mind daddy, but—I don't much like—other men——"

"You have no experience, have you? Has any other man besides your father kissed you?"

There was no reply to that and he wondered why she had gone so white, and why her eyes were like the eyes of a trapped animal.

He repeated the question, rather sharply, and she laughed faintly and said: "Only Julian Cassillis, if you call him a man; he was only a boy, of course, and—I don't like it——"

Tremayne's smile disappeared, and he frowned. "It was an infernal piece of impudence to kiss you, whether he was boy or man. And I thought you told me you were only friends. But surely, if you could put up with Cassillis, you can stand my kissing you? Don't be a silly child, I won't hurt you."

"It was only when he said good-bye," she protested, forced to lie in defence. "And, of course, if you want to——" and she held up her face. "It will be over in a moment," she told herself.

But she had reckoned without Tremayne this time.

He had waited years for this hour, crushing down desire with illimitable patience, biding his time till she should be woman enough to understand, and now the time was ripe. He took her in his arms, and when she would have turned her head away, his hand drew it back so that he could kiss the lips he had longed for, holding her there in a grip of steel—his, his own, at last.

Iris could not endure this, and had not bargained for it. She went white as a pearl, and limp in his arms, sick with a memory which suddenly overwhelmed her.

She was trapped. She longed to tear herself away, and scream, not because she really cared for Cassillis, but because something was all wrong. She was frightened of Tremayne, too, and afraid of the future in his keeping.

He let her go in alarm.

“What on earth is the matter?” he exclaimed in consternation. “Good heavens, Iris, are you ill?”

She laughed hysterically, and said she was only frightened, which annoyed him.

“Frightened because I kissed you? What are you, a baby? Come along, let us walk on. You will be all right in a moment, and you must not be so silly.”

His momentary annoyance rather spoilt the romance, but to her it was a respite. She was tired and faint, and it seemed to her that the same ghost was walking in this sunny garden, and she was trying not to see it. To talk of marriage, when once she had been so near it, and Julian not to know!

CHAPTER XI

THE sun had set over Grindelwald. A rose-pink glowing haze enveloped the shining pinnacles of the Wetterhorn, and the peaks of the Shreckhorn, while the Finsteraahorn stood out in crimson relief against a deep turquoise sky, where already the evening star had trimmed her lamp for the night.

The afternoon train was crawling up the valley from Interlaken. Every window was down and crowded with eager passengers, anxious to see what chances of sport there were, watching with interest and amusement the wild attempts at skiing on the slopes above, and the sleighs and toboggans on the road below.

The train drew into the little station, and the passengers alighted. Among them were two young men, hatless and in tweeds, bearing the unmistakable stamp of the Englishman.

"This will set you up, Cassillis," remarked Langley. "The air is delicious."

Cassillis was sleepy. He had come straight through from Vienna, and been travelling many hours, but even so he roused himself to walk with Langley through the village to the hotel instead of waiting for the hotel sleigh.

"Too many people," was his curt criticism. "It's a crowd. Why did you say Grindelwald? We ought to have gone to a quieter place. This will be full of women and dancing."

"And all the girls will make eyes at you; why don't you add that? I said Grindelwald because the sport is always good here, and the temperature has not a

habit of rising unexpectedly. I thought we came for some skating; never mind what the people do. You don't dance, do you? I don't."

"No, I don't care about it. I had enough in Vienna, where they are dancing mad. I came for fresh air and a rest. I have, as you know, to be in London in ten days' time to sing at Tremayne's concert, and I wanted a holiday first, on the way. It was lucky you could get away at the same time."

Cassillis had changed very little. He was tall, thin, and very fair, a contrast to the shorter, sturdily built Langley, and it was true what the latter had said. The women looked at Cassillis, admired his blue eyes, and raved about his voice. In Vienna, where he had spent this last six months, it had indeed been often embarrassing, for the Viennese ladies were not bashful, and showed him their favour until it disgusted him, for Cassillis had neither eyes nor thoughts for any but one woman.

It was almost two years now since he had seen Iris Stapleton, but he had not changed towards her. Tremayne had scarcely spoken of her, although he had often been in Rome. They had spent a summer holiday together, and he had been to Vienna to see Cassillis installed there. Julian had heard of Jack Stapleton's death, and that Iris and her grandmother had left Hendley, but nothing more.

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There was an ice carnival that evening, and Cassillis, an enthusiastic skater, was soon in the midst of it.

Langley was not so good, and he stood aside and watched the brilliant scene, until a voice beside him said suddenly:

"This is a bit better than Hendley, isn't it?"

There was a girl standing near him, and she answered the remark. "I never dreamt of anything like it," she said, her eyes on the moving pageant.

"Glad you came, are you—though you know, Iris——"

Iris ! He knew the golden hair, and her voice, and stepped forward quickly, uncertain whether to be pleased or not.

"Miss Stapleton !" he exclaimed.

She turned in a flash and faced him.

"Why, it's Mr. Langley ! Fancy meeting you in Grindelwald. I thought you were a clergyman somewhere in London. Geoffrey said you were. How do you come here ?"

He told her he was there only for a holiday, and hesitated whether to say at the same time who his companion was. Perhaps she knew that Cassillis was there—he did not know whether they had been writing each other. It soon appeared, though, that she did not, for one of her first questions was, "How is Julian Cassillis, and where is he ? Do you know ?"

"A few yards away," answered Langley reluctantly, "skating. We met at Basle this morning. He came through from Vienna, and I from England. Where are you staying ?"

"At the Eiger Hotel. Where are you ?"

"That is queer. We are staying there, too. I wonder we did not see you, but there are so many people."

"Mrs. Humphreys and I dined at the Bear," said Iris, and she began to tell him how long they had been out, and where they had been staying. There was no sign of Cassillis, however, and as it was late, her chaperone dragged her away at last.

"Tell him I will see him in the morning," called Iris as she went.

So it happened that the next meeting of these two young people took place in the brilliant morning sunshine, outside the hotel.

Langley had broken the news to Cassillis the previous evening, and, truth to tell, he had been rather worried at its reception, for Cassillis had not said one word of pleasure or otherwise. He had sat quite still, so still that one could have heard a pin drop in the big empty

lounge, and he had gone quite white. After a minute or two—

“What an extraordinary coincidence,” he said, and his voice had been oddly level.

Langley witnessed the meeting between them in the morning, and when he looked back afterwards he called himself a fool for not guessing the truth at once.

Iris made the better show of the two, but when she came out and saw Julian standing by the door, even her self-confidence gave way a little. The colour flew to her face like a scarlet flag, she caught her breath, and her eyes went down.

Cassillis went straight across to her and held out his hands, catching up hers, and holding them against him, as he looked down upon her from his superior height.

It was over in a moment, and they were laughing as they greeted each other, and told all their history, but it left Langley with an uncomfortable feeling that somewhere there was a secret. He looked at Iris's hand. It was bandaged, and when Cassillis asked her about it, she said she had hurt it playing hockey on the ice, and blushed vividly for no reason as she made the casual remark.

But Cassillis had no suspicions. After the first moment he was radiant.

They spent a day of delight together, enjoying every sport. Cassillis did not care what they did as long as he could be with her, could sit and gaze at her, thinking that, in her white dress and with a sable cap over her golden hair, she was the loveliest thing in all creation.

The rift within the lute came that evening, when Iris insisted upon going to a dance, instead of spending the evening alone with him, as he wished. She made no excuse except that it was all new to her, and she wanted to enjoy it, but to Langley, listening to the argument, it seemed again as if there were some

meaning in her wish to keep with the others and give Julian no opportunity to talk to her alone.

It was the same the following day. They spent it outside on the ice rinks and toboggan slopes, but were never for more than a minute by themselves, until it happened that after dinner Mrs. Humphreys refused to go out again, and forced Iris to remain with her.

Mrs. Humphreys was cold and sat close to the radiator, playing bridge. Iris was never cold and did not play cards. She and Cassillis sat at the other end of the large room, and neither spoke.

She had been asking him what he was going to do when he returned to England at the end of his three years, but that he did not know.

"I may not stay in London," he answered. "I suppose it will depend upon Mr. Tremayne. What do you want me to do?"

It was a sudden, unexpected question, and took her breath away.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What have I to do with it?"

"You have never told Tremayne about us, have you?"

She flushed hotly as she caught his eyes.

"We have spoken of you, of course, but Geoffrey never talks about his—protégés."

"You know what I mean. You have not given him even a hint how things are? He is your guardian, isn't he, as well as mine? Do you think he will object to me?"

She shivered a little. "What on earth do you mean? How and why should he object to you?"

"To your marrying me, I mean."

There was a very uncomfortable pause. "That's ridiculous, you know, Julian," she said in a thin little voice. "I can't marry you. Why talk of it? One can't get married on nothing, and it's all we have."

"I shall be rich some day," he said quietly. "I

know it now. I shall pay Tremayne back every penny he has spent on me." He looked straight at her. "And we are going to be married anyway, Iris."

Again she shivered and did not answer.

"I wish it could be now," he added, "before we have to separate again for another year, but it isn't possible. I have still got my special licence, but of course it's no good over here. If you had been in England next week when I get there, I should have looked for you first thing—but you won't be."

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't be so serious!" She was confused and alarmed. "We can't do anything, and—and you'll have every one staring at us. Don't be stupid, Julian; we were only children two years ago—why remember it?" She stopped, unable to continue, and wishing he would take his eyes off her. They seemed so full of reproach and she did not know how to tell him what must be told.

"Children?" he repeated rather puzzled. "I don't think we were. I was not a child, and you promised to marry me, Iris."

Iris could stand no more. She got up with a light laugh and went across to watch the bridge players. Some one came up and asked Cassillis if he would sing, his fame having spread among the guests in the hotel.

"Of course he will," said Iris, answering for him, and, "I will go and sit with Mr. Langley across the room and listen."

Langley was reading, and, without an invitation, she went and sat down beside him, leaving Cassillis the centre of an admiring group from which he could not easily escape.

She spoke in a hurry, her hands clasped desperately together, and the bandage torn off.

"Mr. Langley, do something for me. Please—please tell Julian that I am engaged to Geoffrey Tremayne. I expect you think I am mad, but I

don't know what to do. Julian is talking about my marrying him, and—it's absurd, of course."

Their eyes travelled across the room to where Cassillis, with a very black look, was standing, trying to escape. Then Langley looked at the ring.

"Is that Tremayne's ring?"

"Yes. And Julian does not know; it's so hard to tell him. Please do it for me to-morrow, and I will keep out of the way."

It sounded heartless, and yet she was obviously upset. Langley nodded and looked back at Cassillis. He had evidently been persuaded to sing, and the group had moved across to the piano. He put his book down and turned his attention to this distressed little lady.

"What has Julian been saying to you?"

"Nothing wrong, of course," she answered quickly.

"But I am engaged to Geoffrey, and he must know. I had no idea he would want to remember all that silliness when we were children at Hendley. We were only children, weren't we?" and she appealed to him almost piteously.

"I don't relish the job," returned Langley gloomily.

"He will take it badly, you know, Miss Stapleton, and think it's because he isn't good enough. But, of course, if you want me to, I will tell him. I am fond of Cassillis, and I'd willingly save him anything I could. But I don't see why you can't tell him yourself."

She could not explain it either, and did not try. She just said: "Thanks so much, I knew you would. And please do not tell Julian anything bad about me. Don't tell him I am heartless or anything like that. I can't help it that I have to marry Geoffrey. I dare not break with him, and he is guardian to us both and would not hear of it."

"When are you going to be married?" he asked.

"Not until next summer. Everybody thinks I am tremendously lucky. Geoffrey is going to take me round the world, and I shall have everything I

want——” and then she broke off with a sigh. “But I am frightened of him,” she added.

Langley laughed at the suggestion, and wished her happiness. He had known Tremayne many years and thought him “one of the best.” At the same time, he knew that Iris was right when she said that Tremayne would not allow the marriage between her and Cassillis.

She went back to Mrs. Humphreys, and he followed and sat with them. Cassillis was singing now, and the whole room had stopped to listen.

CHAPTER XII

"MISS STAPLETON is going to marry Tremayne," said Langley.

Cassillis stared at him.

"Did you never guess? I always knew she was going to marry him."

The younger man turned on him like a wild animal.

"It's not true!" he exclaimed roughly, "I don't believe it. It's a lie," and his voice rang out harsh and shrill. "It's a lie! She's mine—mine. She promised to marry me, she swore she would. And Tremayne! I tell you it's a lie."

"Very well," returned Langley quietly. "That's all then. But she asked me to tell you. Miss Stapleton is wearing Tremayne's ring and they are to be married next summer."

"You are mad. He is old enough to be her father."

"It is you who are mad. Tremayne is barely forty, and we all knew he meant to marry her. He has been waiting years for her. I warned you long ago at Hendley——"

"You never mentioned his name. But I don't care, she is not going to marry him. She is mine, and she will marry me."

"Tremayne is her guardian, and you can neither of you marry without his consent. I don't think he would allow her to marry you, do you? Especially as he wants her himself. And you have no money——"

"No name, no money, nothing!" flashed Cassillis bitterly; then, "I know it. Why don't you say so?"

I have no doubt he will tell me so, too, but I don't care, I tell you. She shall marry me."

Langley gave it up. "All right," he said, "have it your own way. But I have told you the truth."

"And I tell you it is not the truth. I don't care what you or he say. I am dependent on him, and owe him everything. I know that, but I shall pay him back every penny in time, and meanwhile I can go on the stage and earn my own living; but marry her, I will."

"Cassillis, you are mad!"

Cassillis laughed harshly. "I may be, but I'm right. You'll see I'm right. I'll go to Tremayne myself—I'll——"

"You had better speak to Miss Stapleton herself first."

Cassillis stopped, and the fury died out of his face. "Do you mind going?" he said; then, in an altered tone, "I don't want to say anything I shall be sorry for afterwards, but I cannot listen to any more now—please go!"

Langley went. He retired to his own room and changed for dinner. When the bell rang he went downstairs feeling rather upset about Cassillis, and annoyed that their promised holiday had turned out so badly. He did not feel very friendly towards Miss Stapleton, either.

Iris was in the lounge, alone, as he entered. She was standing at the far end, and dressed all in white. She looked pale and worried.

"Where's Julian?" she asked. "I haven't seen him all day."

"He's dressing, I think," said Langley lamely, but just then Cassillis came in, and with one swift glance round the empty lounge came straight across to them.

He was very white, and there was something in his face which Langley had not seen before, and never forgot. Iris saw it, too, and shrank away.

"So here you are," he said calmly, but in an odd

voice. "I have not seen you all day, have I? And Langley has been giving me an interesting picce of information this evening. He tells me, Iris, you are going to marry Tremayne; that you are wearing his ring, and are engaged formally to him. I told him he was wrong; in fact, I think I was rude enough to say it was a lie, wasn't I, Langley? But Langley persisted. Perhaps you will be good enough to contradict it yourself now, and tell Langley that you are not engaged to Tremayne but to me."

There was dead silence. Iris shut her eyes, and groped for something to hold on to. Then in a still small voice: "Yes, it's true, Julian," she said. "I'm sorry." And Langley prayed that his friend would stand up to it like a man, and not make a scene.

"You are going to marry Tremayne—*you*?" said Cassillis, and his eyes burnt her.

"Yes," she said faintly. "Oh, Julian, I couldn't help it—oh, Julian—don't!"

He stood and stared at her, and stared. Then, "I congratulate you," he said. "And I hope you will be happy." He turned to Langley with a slight laugh, perfectly calm.

"I beg your pardon, Langley, for the things I said upstairs. I see you were right, and I apologize."

Langley murmured something, he did not know what. He had never felt so embarrassed in his life, though he was glad that Cassillis had taken it so well, and was sufficiently good an actor to play his part perfectly. After that he never doubted that he would succeed on the stage.

And then Mrs. Humphreys came into the lounge, and they went in to dinner.

* * * * *

In the morning Cassillis came straight to Iris and said:

"Will you come out with me?"

She knew what it meant, but agreed at once, and quietly. Langley, watching them go, had won-

dered what the outcome would be. They walked through the village, up the slopes, along the narrow track through the dark fir woods, and out into the sunshine whence they could look down upon the world below. The village was like a picture, the long white valley, and beyond it, the glistening mountain peaks, round which blew the snow in woolly clouds.

All the way up Iris had been talking, telling him in broken, halting sentences all that had happened since he went away, but he had scarcely made any comment—merely nodded; he answered in monosyllables and let her go on.

In the sunshine they sat down on the toboggans to rest.

Cassillis asked if he might smoke, and she replied "Of course," and added pitifully: "Oh, Julian, do help me. Say something——"

He lit his cigarette, and threw the match far away. Then——

"Are you going to tell Tremayne?" he asked.

The colour flew to her face, but she shook her head.

"No, I can't. What would he say? He would never forgive me. He is so good. I don't believe he ever did anything wrong in his life."

"Then why do you wrong him? If you told him—not the truth, that isn't necessary, but that you—you cared for me, he would let you marry me."

"He wouldn't, and I dare not ask him. He would want a stronger reason than that. He would say I didn't know my own mind. Besides, we couldn't do it, Julian."

"You didn't say that two years ago, when you promised me."

"I just thought how jolly it would be to elope and get married secretly. We were so young——"

"Then you didn't care for me. You say now you didn't understand—I understood. I was only a boy and inexperienced, but I loved you, and I didn't mean

any wrong. I thought we were going to be married. Now, I begin to think you never meant to come."

She did not deny it. "What could we have done? Geoffrey would have been furious with us, and probably turned us both adrift. He would have told my father—for you know he would have found out."

"That would have been all right. If he had found out, or you had told him, they would have had to let us marry. Anyhow, you ought to have told him when he first asked you to marry him."

"I had promised daddy then, and he made me. I couldn't help it. And—don't think me a mercenary little cat, Julian, but I couldn't be poor all my life. I'm so tired of it, and it's so lovely to have heaps of pretty things, and be able to travel and enjoy oneself. It was a great temptation, Geoffrey is so good to me. He'll give me everything in the world I can want."

Cassillis laughed bitterly, and shortly.

"Of course, I understand. I'm no fool, and I quite realize I am no match for you. I have neither name, fame, nor money. I may have them all some day, but it might not be for years. You are wise, of course, to take Tremayne, but it is not fair to him. You don't care for him?"

"Of course not. He has always been my father's friend, and that is all. But we are not—not lovers! He's promised to——"

"Yes, you have told me that before, and you are going to sell yourself for it. You will be his wife. And you do not suppose he will give you everything for nothing, do you?"

"Yes, if I am happy. That is all he wants."

She looked surprised at the question, and rather injured, so that he laughed.

"You don't know what you are doing. Tremayne is no better than other men and he will want his pound of flesh. You had much better go back and tell him the plain truth, for all our sakes."

She shook her head. "I am a coward," she said, and he did not contradict her.

"No, I suppose you dare not," he said presently. "I was never presumptuous enough to think your people would allow us to marry unless we had to, and now—we could elope, but you don't care for me enough. I have nothing much to offer you, so it's not worth while. You see, I thought you cared. Oh, come along, let us go down. What's the good of talking about it and prolonging it? It's torture to me—and I'm cold."

He shivered as he spoke, and she felt the same chill steal over her as if a cold shadow had risen between them.

In silence they mounted their toboggans, and in a few moments were widely separated over the snowy slope. When they came together again at the foot of the hill, they spoke no more about it.

CHAPTER XIII

WOMANLIKE, Iris had to come and sit next to him in the lounge that night, as if nothing had happened, and say :

"Are you really leaving to-morrow ? I thought you were going to stay all the week, but Mr. Langley says not."

"I have had a letter from Tremayne," answered Cassillis. "He wants me to come earlier for some reason. Would you like to see the letter ?"

She took it, and read it. A short note, characteristic of the man, asking Julian to be in London on an earlier date and meet him at the Cimric. Then he added :

"I did not know you were going to Grindelwald, and you will, of course, have met Miss Stapleton and Mrs. Humphreys at the Eiger hotel. I should have told you myself when we met about the engagement, but doubtless my fiancée has already enlightened you. We are to be married, I hope, in the summer, and we shall expect you to come to our wedding, and spend next Christmas with us at Trelawn. . . ."

Iris dropped the letter. "He takes everything for granted, you see. That is Geoffrey all over. He asked me to marry him with the ring in his pocket, and he will arrange the wedding day with grand-mamma, and then they will tell me. He just manages me. Can't you see that it would not be the slightest use telling him about you unless I told him everything ? He would only smile and tell me not to talk nonsense."

"Yes. But there is an alternative. You could come back with me to Vienna. I need not go to London to-morrow, and we could—well, elope. That could be done before he could stop us."

It was late. Mrs. Humphreys had already gone to her room, and Langley was out. They had the lounge to themselves, for Iris had come down purposely to find, and talk to, him.

"I couldn't do that," she said. "It wouldn't be fair."

"Is this fair?" Suddenly he flashed into bitter anger: "But you want the money, and all that Tremayne can give you, and I can't."

She was ready to cry. "It's not true! But I dare not come," she said.

"You won't be happy with him. Not though he is the best man on earth. When he kisses you——"

"He doesn't, at least not much——"

"He will." He got up. "Iris, come with me," he begged. "Let us start to-morrow morning. There is a train at seven o'clock; we can go by that to Basle, and get through to Vienna, and we will write to Tremayne when we get there. Say you will——"

He caught her in his arms, and kissed her, and kissed her; but though Iris allowed it, weeping in his arms, she would not promise.

"I can't, I can't!" she sobbed. "We have nothing to live upon and there is my grandmother at home. How could I leave her like that?"

Then there was a step behind them, and Langley stood there. He had come in unnoticed, to witness the scene.

"Do you know it is after eleven o'clock," he said, "and the lights are turned off in the hotel at eleven? What are you doing, Cassillis? And do you, both of you, call this playing the game to Tremayne?"

Iris dragged herself away, and turned to him with tears in her eyes. "Oh, Mr. Langley, I'm so glad

you came. Do tell Julian to be sensible. I cannot marry him."

"Of course you cannot," returned Langley. "What are you thinking of, Cassillis—eloping? It's madness!"

"No, it isn't madness." Cassillis threw the words at him. "It's only right. Iris belongs to me, and she cannot marry Tremayne. You had better leave us to it."

The colour flew to her face. "I don't belong to you. I didn't know what I was doing. I was only a little girl."

"Then you never meant to marry me?" demanded Cassillis of her—but that she could not answer.

"Go along, Miss Stapleton," said Langley quietly. "What do you think Tremayne would say if he knew you were down here like this after the lights are supposed to be out? What if Mrs. Humphreys comes down to look for you? You have not much sense of honour, Cassillis. Don't be a fool, let her go!"

"She can never go," replied Cassillis, "and she knows it." But Iris did not hear him.

"I can't go with you to Vienna, Julian," she repeated. "I'm sorry, but it wouldn't be fair to Geoffrey."

"And you want the cursed money," he retorted, "that's the real reason. You don't love him, and you do love me, but he has more to offer you than I. Very well then—go! Go back to him. You'll pay—you'll pay all your life for it."

He was like a primeval man in that moment, fighting for his mate, but the call of the world into which she had been born was too strong for her, and she would not give in.

"I'm sorry. I can't—" she said, and turned to go. Cassillis watched her cross the lounge without speaking.

Then she turned back to him and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Julian," she said scarcely above a whisper, "you won't tell Geoffrey, will you?"

He looked at her. "No."

"Never?"

"No, I won't tell him without your permission."

"You promise me that?"

He flung her hand off. "I have said I will not tell him. Go along upstairs—or—or I shall kill you!"

Iris fled. She was afraid, and would not have come back but to make sure of his silence.

* * * * *

Cassillis left Grindelwald next day.

True to her pride and principles, Iris came down to the station to see him off, and under a hundred pair of eyes they bade each other good-bye.

"I shall not be at your wedding," said Cassillis stiffly, as they shook hands, "but I wish you happiness, and that in your marriage you will get those things you hope to gain. But I shall not forget, you know."

She avoided his eyes which looked into hers with terrible accusation. "Good-bye," she said. "Good-bye, Julian."

The train crawled out of the sunny little station and down into the valley.

Cassillis stood on the back platform of the carriage alone, a solitary figure gazing with tragic fascination at the white world of sunshine and joy which he was leaving, together with the girl he had loved, worked for, hoped for, and lost.

And thus he stepped into his manhood, leaving the last of his boyhood with the rosy Alpine sunset.

The pink glow was reflected on the Wetterhorn: below all was grey and still, wrapped in the creeping shadows of approaching evening. The air grew still, and a little puff of freezing wind came up the valley.

The train crawled on. The mountains were hidden,

and their place was taken by huge rocks from which hung vast icicles and frozen waterfalls. It was a grimly severe scene of winter, with neither sun nor sound.

By the time he reached Interlaken there was only a faint afterglow on the lake of Thun.

* * * * *

Less than twenty-four hours later he was met by Tremayne in London.

CHAPTER XIV

IRIS made more than one attempt to break off her engagement that spring, but each attempt met with failure.

She heard from Cassillis, after he returned to Vienna, but he did not again ask her to come out, and she would not have gone if he had.

If she had ever wavered and regretted her decision in the land of sun and snow, once she was home again the material advantages of her marriage to Tremayne prevailed.

Then, once more, after another letter from Cassillis, she was frightened, and one day when Tremayne was staying in the house, she approached him with a direct question.

"Geoffrey," she said suddenly, "do you still want very much to marry me?"

Tremayne was reading at the moment. He put the paper down and looked at her. "Of course I do. Why?"

"I wish you would let me off."

"Again, why? Don't you want to marry me?"

"It isn't that, but it does not seem fair to you."

He put the paper down and came across to her.

"What do you mean? Tell me at once. Have you met another man whom you prefer to me? If it is merely that you do not consider the bargain a fair one, that is for me to judge, isn't it?"

"I do not love you," cried Iris desperately. "And I ought to."

"You love no one else, and you are young. There is no one else, you are sure?"

She shook her head, and yet—

"If there were another man, would you let me go, Geoffrey?"

"That depends upon the man, as I have told you. I should not let you go for any man I know now. Why these questions?"

"I am afraid of you, and of marrying you. I am not good enough and I am afraid you will not be satisfied with me."

"Nonsense, child! You will satisfy me, of course, and give me all I shall want. You are nervous and silly."

She moved away. It was like battering against steel, and she felt powerless. He would never let her go.

Tremayne called her back, and she went obediently to him.

"Kiss me good night," he ordered. "And do not be a silly child any more. We are going to be quite happy."

She did not like his kisses, little though they amounted to, but she dare not refuse.

"Now don't say things like this again," he said while he held her. "I don't like it."

* * * * *

Iris had walked into the net with her eyes wide open, thinking that she could walk out again when she chose, but the opportunity never came.

It was March when she returned to England, and in June her grandmother died.

She had been staying in Scotland with Mrs. Humphreys, when the latter was suddenly called to Canada by the death of a relative. She sailed for Montreal from Glasgow, and a day or two later Iris set off for Bournemouth.

To her surprise Tremayne met her at Euston. She believed that he was in Paris, and frankly stared at him.

"What are you here for? You didn't tell me you were coming home so soon."

They stood on the platform, and he held her hand.

"Oh, what is the matter?" she cried, her thoughts flying to Vienna at once. "It's not—Julian?"

With a second's reflection she knew it could not be Julian, for if anything had happened to him Tremayne would not have come back to London post-haste to tell her.

"It is bad news," he said, as if he had not heard her exclamation. "It is your grandmother. She died yesterday. It was very sudden and she did not suffer at all."

"Oh, I am so thankful!" Iris did not know what she said, but fortunately for her he misunderstood her words and agitation.

"Yes, I am thankful for that too," he returned. "Now I will take you to have some tea, and then we will go on to Bournemouth."

He had his car there, and drove her to the Cimric, where they had tea in a corner of the lounge. Tremayne told her he had been to Bournemouth, and there was nothing she could do, or that he had not already attended to.

"The question is, what are you going to do now?" he asked. "You appear to have no relatives, at least none to look after you, and I am sure you do not want to go on living at Bournemouth by yourself. And unfortunately, Mrs. Humphreys has just gone to Canada."

"Then I shall have to go to Bournemouth, I suppose," said Iris gloomily. "I hate the place, but there is nowhere else. What are you going to do after the funeral?"

Tremayne said he would have to return to Paris. He had rushed back when one of Mrs. Stapleton's servants had wired to him, and left his business unfinished. He would have to return as soon as possible.

"Take me with you," said Iris quietly. "Why not?"

"My dear child, I wish I could, but it is not practicable. You will have to wait for Mrs. Humphreys and then you can come over."

She drank her tea with a thoughtful air, and neither spoke for several minutes. Then—

"Geoffrey, do you still want to marry me?"

"We discussed that in April, and I told you not to do so again."

"I only wanted to know. Then couldn't we—couldn't we be married quite soon, and then I could go with you? If we were married I could go to Paris with you, couldn't I?"

He looked at her very straightly.

"Yes, in those circumstances you could, of course, but I did not intend that we should be married yet. I wanted to give you a little longer time. Are you sure you mean it?"

She protested that she did, for at the moment it seemed the far lesser evil. And it would be rather nice to go abroad again so soon.

"You know you can't get out of it afterwards if you don't like it," he warned her. "So think well——"

She smiled at him. "I think it would be the loveliest thing in the world," she said thoughtlessly. "Much better than staying in Bournemouth all by myself."

Tremayne thought it over rather doubtfully. He wanted it but knew the dangers.

"Very well," he agreed. "We will do that. I will take you to Bournemouth to-night, and after the funeral I will come back and get a special licence. We can be married almost at once at a church I know of not far from here. The rector is a friend of mine, and Langley is one of the curates."

Iris shivered suddenly. The words "special licence" brought back a poignant recollection which

just then she would have given worlds to have forgotten. Some one long ago had gone back to London to get one, had got it, too, and then she had backed out.

She would not be able to do that this time, as well she knew.

And Langley ! Why should Tremayne want to be married at that particular church ? There must be many other churches in town.

"Unless you would rather be married at Hendley ?" he was saying. "If you would, I will make arrangements."

"No, I should hate it," she answered abruptly. "Certainly not Hendley, that would be worse than ever." And then, as he stared at her, she forced a smile.

"What does it matter where we are married ?"

* * * * *

They went to Bournemouth, and the frail old lady was laid to rest there ; her granddaughter and Tremayne were the only mourners.

And Iris was left alone. She was twenty years of age, and without a penny in the world. She had Stapleton Court, but it was let and the rent had to go to pay the mortgage upon it.

It is not to be wondered at that she made no more effort to escape, and a few days later she and Tremayne were quietly married.

There was no time to decorate the church, and it was not a choral service ; but as it happened, there was a choir practice in progress that morning which had to be suspended to permit the ceremony to take place, and the vicar asked Tremayne, by the organist's request, if they might sing a wedding hymn for them, and also if he might play the wedding march afterwards as some slight return for the many kindnesses Tremayne had bestowed upon the church in the last few years. And because they happened to be a beautifully trained choir, Tremayne consented.

It was a hot sunny day in early June, and Iris wore white, something soft and clinging, and a large black hat. She was very pale and nervous, but Tremayne, immaculate and inscrutable, was as calm as ever. They stood side by side, and she heard her own voice repeating the sentences. They knelt together while the summer sun shone through the south windows and gilded alike his dark hair and her golden waves. And above and around them floated the voices of the choir, like angels far away :—

“O perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before Thy Throne,
That theirs may be the love that knows no ending,
Whom Thou for evermore dost join in one.”

Iris wondered if Julian had ever sung that hymn in a choir and at a wedding, and if his voice were not more angelic than even these.

“Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow,
Grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife ;
And to life’s day the glorious unknown morrow
Which dawns upon eternal love and life.”

Iris went through the service in a dream. She was vaguely aware that there were two priests officiating, but she had not looked at them until the singing of the hymn.

Then, suddenly, she followed the long ray of sunlight falling aslant the chancel, and in its path gilding the head of the younger priest, and with a shock she saw that it was Langley.

She had not seen him since she had said good-bye to him in the snow and sunshine at Grindelwald. And Julian, who was in Vienna, did not even know of her marriage.

“Poor Julian !” she thought pitifully, and wondered then whether, if that other licence had been used, the wedding would have been anything like this one. It might have been, only the names would have been different.

“ I, Julian, take thee, Iris,” instead of “ I, Robert Geoffrey, take thee, Iris——”

Her eyes fixed themselves upon Langley, and it seemed to her that Julian’s eyes looked at her through his.

Did Langley know ? Did he know, when the rector said in his loud voice, “ Now speak—or else hereafter forever hold his peace ” ?

Would he write and tell Julian, saying, “ I helped to marry them and did not speak.” But of course it was not really a “ just cause and impediment,” she was sure of that.

“ I pronounce that they be man and wife together,” so the priest had said.

But by the laws of God and nature she was already the wife of Julian Cassillis.

CHAPTER XV

A CROWDED train, a choppy crossing, and another crowded train. Iris was tired and silent. She was a good sailor and refused the state-room which Tremayne wished to reserve for her ; she preferred the deck and the air, and they sat and read papers as if they were anything but bride and bridegroom straight out of church.

Tremayne was quite himself, calm and dominant, but Iris was different. She had hardly a word to say, and looked pale and frightened now that it was done.

Even Tremayne could not reserve a compartment in the Paris express, but only their two seats in a carriage for six, and they had to dine on the train as they did not arrive at the Gare du Nord until nearly ten o'clock at night.

Iris could not eat ; she nibbled her roll, and had some fruit and wine ; but she shook her head at the other food, and was unspeakably glad when at last they arrived.

At the Hotel Vincennes a bright welcome awaited them, for Tremayne was nearly as well known there as at the Cimric, and he had written for a suite of rooms, stating that this time he was bringing Madame. So that in the big domed hall, with its pillars, its tiled floor, and many palms, the manager bowed over them with congratulations ; and in the background a smiling staff welcomed the bride and bridegroom.

"Madame is tired, and I think must be hungry," said Tremayne kindly, after the manager had finished

his speech and offered to escort them up to the suite. He turned to Iris. "What would you like? Some soup, sandwiches? It's too late for dinner, but you have had nothing."

She shook her head, but he insisted, and gave an order for some wine and sandwiches.

"Go up with the manager," he said to her. "I will follow you, but I have some telegrams to answer first."

She obeyed, and followed the man. He talked all the way, but she did not know much French, and could not understand his rapid speech, and although she had been in Paris once before with Mrs. Humphreys she felt strange and frightened.

It was a large room into which she was ushered, furnished like most Parisian bedrooms with plenty of crimson, lace, and gilt.

Two highly-polished beds stood side by side under a crimson satin curtain hung from a gilt ring. They had square embroidered pillows and thick crimson satin eiderdowns.

There were two windows, curtained with satin and lace, overlooking a green courtyard; a door led into a dressing-room. As she stood looking round, the manager was volubly explaining that the bathroom was on the other side of the passage, and a sitting-room also, that it was a complete suite, and that he hoped it would please Madame.

Madame, however, took no notice. She was waiting for him to go, and glad when at last he withdrew.

Then the porters brought up the luggage. They had mixed it up, and left Tremayne's dressing-case and his coat in her room.

Next, a chambermaid entered, simpering and smiling as she put down hot water and prepared the beds. She asked if she could help Madame to unpack, but Iris only stared at her, frozen with a new horror.

At last she was alone, but she did not move. She

just stood in the centre of the room, not even troubling to remove her hat, and she was still there when Tremayne came in. He shut the door, and the faint click made her heart leap.

Then he came across. "Now!" he said, and would have taken her in his arms. "Now, at last——"

Iris held him off. She pushed him away with both hands, fought against him, and cried: "Don't! Oh, don't!" when he kissed her.

"Why not?" he asked amused. "It is my turn now. You are my wife. Mustn't I kiss you?"

Iris turned her head away. "Oh, please let me go, please—please do"—he loosened his hold. "I don't like being kissed—I've told you so."

"You must learn to like it now. And I have kissed you many times."

"Not like this. No, you must not."

"You are such a child. You didn't expect it to be the same, did you? I think I have been the most patient of men."

She shrank away, her eyes full of terror. "No. I don't want you, I told you so. I told you I didn't love you."

"And I told you I would teach you to do so. Come into my arms. I have waited so long for you, Iris, and I want to tell you how much I love you."

She shook her head and turned her eyes away. "You didn't talk like this at all when we were engaged. You never spoke of love, you didn't even want to kiss me, only when you said good night and good morning. Why do you want to change everything now?"

"We are married now. It is true I have not worried you for much affection all these months. You seemed so young to me, and I wanted to give you time. I did not intend our marriage to be yet, but you suggested it——"

"I did not understand. I thought you wanted me to be happy, and that was all. You always said you

would be kind to me and give me a good time. I didn't think you wanted—wanted——”

“Oh, nonsense!” He laughed a little, but with an impatient note.

“You are tired and foolish to-night. Take off your hat, and I will get you some wine. You have had a long, tiring day, I quite understand—but you must not behave like a silly child, my dear Iris. Do you see?”

He turned to the door, but she stopped him.

“I don't want any wine. Can't you understand what I am feeling? If I had thought you were going to be like this I would never have married you. I didn't know, and I don't like you a bit when you are cross and look at me like that. You said you would be good to me. I told you——”

“I am not cross, and I will be good to you, but you must be sensible. You married me, and I asked you if you were sure you were ready and wanted to do so.”

“I didn't understand. Can't we go on as we did before?”

“No. Men don't get married to go on the same way as before. I never heard of such an absurd idea.” He was impatient.

“Then you should have told me,” answered Iris, fighting now. “I asked you to release me in April, and told you that I didn't love you as I should, and you told me it would be all right and I should give you all you would want.”

“Naturally I expected you would. I certainly did not expect this violent opposition, and according to your ideas, the bargain would not be a fair one. You were right. But I am not going to accept it, so do not make any mistake. I will allow that you are not yourself to-night, and excuse your foolishness, but you will please not continue it. You are my wife now. Why did you think I wanted to marry you?”

"You were my father's friend, and you promised him to look after grandmamma and myself. I thought you were doing it for him. It is not as if you were a young man, or as if you had ever—ever made love to me. You never did. You said I was to be happy, but if you are going to be horrid I shall be miserable."

"It would not make you happy to live a semi-detached life with your husband. It's an appalling state of affairs and we should both be miserable. Don't talk nonsense."

She did not speak then. She went across to the mirror and took off her hat. From there she turned.

"Do you mean you won't let me off?"

"Certainly not! I am your husband, and you must abide by your choice. I did not force nor hurry you into marriage, neither are you a child. You promised to obey me in church this morning, and I do not propose to withdraw all my rights and privileges for a whim. Now I am going to get you some wine, and then you can go to bed. In the morning perhaps you will have a little more sense."

Iris flushed with shame and then grew white; her eyes closed a moment, and then opened and looked at him—he never forgot them, nor their expression.

"If you touch me I shall loathe you," she said quietly. "And I will not stay with you, I warn you now——"

He was round on her like a flash. "You will stay with me! How dare you talk like that? You have taken leave of your senses. I am not a brute, but I am not a man to be fooled, and you may as well know it. We will discuss this matter to-morrow, when you are sensible, and I will say good night, now."

He strode past her, and when she would have caught hold of him to plead with him, he shook off her hands. Iris was faint with weariness, but still she fought one last point.

“There is no lock on the door between my room and yours.”

He stopped to look at her. If he had not been so angry he would have smiled at her childishness.

“Of course not, there never is in a suite like this. What do you want a lock for? The outside door is locked and that is sufficient. You are not to lock the door into my room, whether there is a key or not, either here or elsewhere. I shall not intrude upon you, you need not fear.”

She dropped her hand and turned away. She was beaten, and knew it. He passed her and went into his room beyond.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR the whole of the next day nothing was said. Tremayne took Iris out with him, as if nothing extraordinary had happened and they were the friends they had always been.

He attended to the business he had left a fortnight before, and she went shopping, anxious to buy herself the trousseau she had missed by her hurried wedding.

He was very calm, so calm that it seemed impossible that he had ever been otherwise, but he was also very stern and unbending.

Then when the evening came, and Iris was dressed and ready for dinner, he came into her room.

She was trying to fasten his pearls, and he said : " Let me do that for you," and, standing behind her while he clasped it, he added :

" I am sorry to have to refer to the scene we had last night, Iris, but it is impossible to go on like this, and we must know how we stand. I don't want to force you to give me anything you do not wish, but to carry out your suggestion and live as strangers would only bring unhappiness to us both. We are tied together, you and I, for our lives. You say you did not understand the bargain, and, therefore, whether I believe you or not, I am willing to make reasonable terms with you. While we are abroad I will expect nothing from you, but when we go home to Trelawn I shall claim you as my wife. Do you understand ? "

Iris's head was bent, and she only said " Yes " in a low tone.

"Will you agree to that?"

"If I must."

"Will you give me your promise not to go back on that?"

"Yes."

"Very well then, that is all. I shall keep my side of the bargain if you keep yours, and in the meanwhile we will be good friends, as we have always been."

They stood in silence for a few moments and he looked at her, but she did not once raise her eyes, and something—something puzzled him; the same thing which had puzzled him the morning he had asked her to marry him at Stapleton Court six months before.

* * * * *

They went to Italy from Paris, and in Rome had the misfortune to run across Cassillis.

Tremayne knew he was there, spending a week's holiday with a former friend, and timed their visit to coincide with his, because he was anxious to see Cassillis again, and this was an opportunity. But Iris had to resort to a number of excuses and subterfuges to cover a most uncomfortable few days.

She began by saying she had a headache when Tremayne asked her to accompany him to Cassillis's hotel to call upon him, which was not at all like Iris, who never suffered from headaches; and then, when Tremayne went alone to pay the unexpected call, for the young man did not know which day he would arrive, there was something obviously very wrong.

It was morning, and Cassillis was having his coffee. He got up, looking as if he had seen a ghost, went as white as a sheet, and stammered horribly over his greeting.

"Are you not pleased to see me?" asked Tremayne, astonished and dismayed. "I thought you would be."

Of course Cassillis said he was delighted. He pulled himself together and was quite natural in a minute, but the first impression remained.

Tremayne argued to himself that it might be that the young man's sensitive, highly-strung nature resented even pleasant shocks, but it was hard to believe, and, remembering Julian's peculiar manner on his visit to London last winter, he was more inclined to think that the latter had something to hide, and was not prepared for his coming.

"I suppose you are on your honeymoon?" he asked presently.

Tremayne admitted it, and said what a pity it was that Iris had a headache, and had been unable to accompany him this morning, to which there was no reply.

"You must dine with us to-night," went on Tremayne, "and meet my wife."

There was no excuse which either of them could find at short notice, and that evening, therefore, they met in the huge hall of the hotel beneath a thousand glittering lights, in the midst of a crowd of Rome's best society.

They shook hands and said "How-do-you-do," and Tremayne, standing there, saw nothing unusual in the greeting. Cassillis had his friend, a young Italian count, with him, and in consequence conversation during dinner was carried on in French.

Iris wore white and gold. She looked radiantly young and pretty, but there were shadows in her eyes, and every now and again she and Cassillis looked at each other, drawn by an impulse neither could help. Looked—and then looked away, tortured by undying memories.

They smiled, and said how lovely the weather was, how fine a city was Rome, and so on, but they were thankful when it was over.

Iris had not known how clever an actress she could be until to-night, but Cassillis did not make so good a show. He was nervous, and more so with Tremayne than with her. He kept his eyes lowered most of the

evening, as if he were afraid to look at her lest he should give himself away.

But nothing happened, and after a day or two they left the city.

* * * * *

At the beginning of October they went home to Trelawn.

Southern England was looking gorgeous in her mantle of yellow and brown, and there was still a wealth of flowers within the grounds.

Chrysanthemums bloomed round the house, dahlias reared their proud heads in every colour, and the last of the summer roses were rioting still in the rose garden.

"It is beautiful," remarked Iris as they drove up the long drive. "I am glad we have come home."

"And this is your home," he replied. "You are mistress of it all."

They went into the hall, where the housekeeper and servants met them, but Tremayne insisted upon taking his bride to her rooms himself; the same rooms he had shown her almost three years ago.

"Now you are really home," he said as they went in. "No one, no other woman has ever had these rooms, nor slept here, but the mistress of Trelawn, the wife of the owner and holder. Come in."

She passed him and entered. It was light and warm. There were flowers about, and the last of the daylight was lingering through the west windows. He followed her and shut the door after him.

"I hope you will be happy, Iris," he said quietly, "and like your home. It will seem quiet to you at first, but we shall have plenty of visitors later on. You will try and be happy, won't you?"

Iris stood still and gazed round. "It's lovely," she said, with a little catch in her voice. "Much too good for me. I should be very wicked if I were not happy here." She went across to the window and looked out, while he stood still on the white skin rug

in front of the fire, and waited. She knew what he was waiting for, but there was a ghost in Trelawn, a ghost which had been quiet for quite a long time, but which came back now and mocked her. She shut her eyes and trembled, feeling its look upon her, boring holes in her bent head, reproaching her—till she could bear no more.

She opened her eyes and went into the arms he held open for her. "You are much too good to me," she murmured. "But indeed, I will try!" Tremayne did not answer. He caught her close, and kissed her lips again and again, as he had kissed her that night in Paris, but all he said was "My wife!"

* * * * *

And now it was late. They had dined together alone in the dining-room, so big that half of it was in shadow, with the watchful eyes of the old butler upon her; and afterward they had their coffee in the pink drawing-room.

Iris lay in the little satinwood bed, beneath the satin rose-painted curtain, and watched the shaded electric lamplight reflecting upon the dainty white and green hangings, the rose-strewn curtains at the windows and the shining furniture.

Her maid had unpacked her toilet things. They were Tremayne's presents, in tortoiseshell and silver, and they shone on the table like the rope of pearls he had given her on their wedding day, which now hung like a chain from the mirror where she had left it, forgotten at the last moment.

As she watched it, it seemed to her to grow into a huge cable binding her to the giver for ever.

It was in these rooms that he had first put the pearls round her neck.

It was at Trelawn that Julian had first kissed her, had first told her that he loved her, and asked her to wait for him. She turned her face to the soft scented linen and hid it there.

Oh, why would not the shadow go away, why would

it mock her to-night, almost as if it knew? She longed to tell so much, and then forget, before Julian came home, and—as he would have to—came to Trelawn.

Then Tremayne came in. He looked good, strong, and noble, and she thought of her own weakness, and was silent.

CHAPTER XVII

THE last year during which Cassillis was in Vienna brought out his real talent and decided his career. He mixed with many musical people, was able now to choose his own society, and the result was that he left the classical alone, and joined the operatic.

His master, finding that he so much preferred the latter, and was so much more clever in the interpretation of it, ceased therefore to work him on the classical composers, but let him follow his desire and sing Wagner, and the more modern ones.

Tremayne would have been horrified, but he did not know. He might have permitted Wagner, or oratorios, possibly Puccini, but Strauss and similar composers left him not cold, but raging.

He wanted Julian to come back to London at Christmas and work his last year there. But Cassillis had been offered a berth in the repertoire company at the Opera House and he wanted to take it, and remain where he was. In this way he would save himself and Iris the discomforts which were bound to come in the future if he went home. He wanted to stay in Vienna for at least another year, but Tremayne, whose suspicions were now really roused, would not hear of it.

He sent a peremptory letter calling him back, and asking him to spend Christmas at Trelawn.

This was terrible. Cassillis begged to go to Rome instead, and then asked if he might not join an English opera company. He said he liked opera best, and

would be willing to work hard and even go on tour, if he might be allowed to take it up.

"I could not think of it," wrote Tremayne. "Come home and we will talk it over, but no protégé of mine has ever gone on the stage, and I cannot agree to your suggestion." And again he asked Julian to come to Trelawn for Christmas.

For the first time Cassillis rebelled. He went to Rome, and wired to Tremayne from there that he would be in England in the middle of January. Further than that he could not go on his own initiative, as Tremayne was the moving factor in the case.

It was for his annual concert in January that he wanted his protégé back, and Cassillis came, unwillingly, in time to sing at it.

Iris was present that night, with Tremayne and Mrs. Humphreys; Langley came with Cassillis, and after it was over they went out to supper together.

"You sang very well," said Tremayne critically. "But you can do with another year's study to finish with. You are rather too dramatic for the concert stage, you know."

"Of course I am," returned Cassillis with a smile. "I am a born actor, I can't help it. They all told me so in Vienna and in Rome. If you would only allow me to go on the stage——"

"No, certainly not," interrupted Tremayne, "I hate the idea. Stick to the concert platform, though I have no doubt you will be approached by the theatrical profession. They will try and get hold of you."

Cassillis said, speaking with a smile, that it had already happened. He said that a Lady Hammond had written to ask him to her house to meet Valentine Calvey, the lessee and manager of the Star Theatre. He was rather puzzled how she had known about him, until Tremayne reminded him that she was the lady who had met them coming out

of a theatre long ago, when he first came to town from Cornwall.

"Funny, she should write to me," said Cassillis, still puzzled, and more so at Tremayne's obvious annoyance over the little occurrence.

"Of course she wants to get hold of you for the light opera stage," he said. "I know that. She tried it before, but I hope you will not go."

"I have no intention of doing so," said Cassillis in surprise. "I never take any notice of the letters women write me. They used to do it in Vienna, and in Rome, but it has no effect on me. I can't help it, so I take no notice."

The calm acceptance of the fact worried Tremayne for the younger man's sake. He asked him once more to come to Trelawn, thinking that he could give him some sound advice once he had him under his roof again; and on this occasion there was no excuse. He avoided Iris's eyes, and said:

"Thanks, I shall be very pleased to come."

* * * * *

Tremayne met him at the station, and drove him to Trelawn.

Iris was engaged entertaining some neighbours to tea, as he explained, but there was no one else staying in the house. He wanted to have Julian alone this week-end, after such a long absence.

They found the visitors still there, to Julian's relief, and by the time they had all gone, it was time to change; and then dinner was ready, so that he and Iris had scarcely a moment to look at each other until they came to the round table to dine.

Julian fell silent, and wished he had not come. He could not talk and could not eat, and he wondered desperately how on earth he was going to get through the week-end successfully. He cursed his traitorous heart that it would not keep still when he looked at her, and remembered, but would send the blood coursing through his veins, making him feel on fire.

Iris chattered all the time to cover the uncomfortable pauses, and Tremayne, noticing her gay manner with pleasure, smiled at her across the table, the joyous smile of the man who possesses the thing he has so long coveted and at last obtained.

Once he called her "darling," and Cassillis crushed down a sudden murderous feeling within him. When he said "my wife," the young man winced, and every touch he gave her was like a red-hot iron placed upon himself.

But Tremayne, in love himself, noticed nothing except the shadow on his guest's face, and his silence.

When, at last, what had seemed an endless meal to Cassillis came to an end, and Iris left them alone in the dining-room, Tremayne asked the boy kindly what was the matter with him, and if he did not like coming back to England and settling in London,

"Not very much," answered Cassillis reluctantly. "I liked the life abroad, especially in Rome. I shall try and go out again in the summer, if you don't object."

"I have no reason to object. But I wonder at your making friends over there and not keeping to your own countrymen. Don't you want to go away with Langley this summer?"

"I don't know that he will care about it. And Langley is too big for me. It's rather difficult to live up to him."

"I think he is a very good influence for you, and I am sure he thinks a lot of you. I thought at Hendley you and he were such great friends, and that he was doing you good."

"It was your influence, not his. I would have done anything for you; in fact, I would still do so. But for your kindness I should still be at Coastcliff and I don't forget it. You were my first and only friend."

"I hope I shall always be a friend," said Tremayne warmly. "You have no home except this, for I

know you will never return now to Cornwall, and your so-called parents. But I shall always be glad to have you, and you must look upon this as your home. Stop calling me Mr. Tremayne, and look upon me as an elder brother; I will be either 'Geoffrey' or 'Tremayne,' whichever you prefer."

Cassillis played with his wineglass and did not look up.

"You are very good," he answered in a low tone. "I can never be grateful enough to you. I hope I shall never disappoint you, but sometimes—I am afraid. I am not good enough for men like you and Langley."

"Nonsense." Tremayne smiled tolerantly. "You are not very bad. You are young, and things always look black to young people. Iris talks in the same way, as if the child had ever done a wrong thing in her life! Perhaps you have run a bit wild this last year or two, but all young men sow a certain amount of wild oats, you know, and I shouldn't worry about it if I were you."

Cassillis tried to laugh, but he had been hard hit by the unconscious reference to Iris.

"Something has gone wrong, hasn't it?" questioned Tremayne. "I can see it. I noticed it, too, in the summer when I saw you in Rome. Perhaps you will tell me what it is some day——"

There was no reply, and with a little sigh he got up and added: "We must go into the drawing-room. My wife will be waiting——"

He slipped his hand into Cassillis's arm; he did everything he could think of to make him happy and at home, and to win his confidence, but the shadow did not lift.

Iris was sitting by the fire yawning over a novel, which her husband took from her disapprovingly, saying:

"I wish you wouldn't read books of this sort, Iris. They are not suitable for a girl like you, and

are not nice. I can't understand what you find interesting in them."

"They are amusing," she returned carelessly. "One gets tired of good books, and these are frightfully funny."

"Funny, do you call them? I call them merely disgusting! What has a girl like you to do with women who are the heroines of pernicious books, I should like to know?" He dropped the offending volume as if it burnt him.

Cassillis looked on in silence, wondering how she managed to endure it, and laugh.

"Won't you sing, Mr. Cassillis?" she begged. "And cheer us up? Tame the savage beast, as it were, for he looks cross."

Tremayne smiled at her then, and touched her peach-bloom cheek with his finger. "Not very savage to you," he said. "But I think Cassillis is tired. He has had a lot of singing this week."

"Yes, I am rather tired," answered Cassillis. "If you wouldn't mind, I will sing to you to-morrow"—and then he added—"and Mrs. Tremayne."

CHAPTER XVIII

QUITE unsuspecting, believing that any foolishness between these two young people had died a natural death years ago, nipped in the bud by his timely interference, Tremayne left them the following afternoon to entertain one another while he wrote letters, buried away in his library.

Iris tried to feel exactly the same. She ran Cassillis to earth in the music-room, told him what her husband had said, and took him upstairs to her pretty sitting-room to show him all the treasures which she had brought home from the continent.

She gave him tea there, and persuaded him to sing to her to the accompaniment of the little piano.

He did not object to that, glad to put his soul into the music at last, without Tremayne there to listen, but was so tragic over it that she was a little bit scared, feeling that the mocking ghost was once more at her shoulder.

They were silent for quite a little while after the music. She was at a loss what to talk about, and he sat on the music-stool smoking a cigarette, and crushing down the desire to say a thousand words of love to her, as he would have done a year ago in Grindelwald—watching her nervous fingers twining in and out of her chain of pearls, and the sun shining on her hair.

"I suppose Tremayne gave you those pearls on your wedding day?" he asked abruptly. "Have you everything you want now?"

"All these sort of things, yes," she waved her hand

round the room. "Don't you admire my pearls, and my pretty clothes? You ought to, being an artist."

"You looked just as pretty in your old clothes, if you called them old, when we were at Hendley. Any one as pretty as you are doesn't need clothes to set her off. You were happy then, too. Money isn't everything, but if you are satisfied, that is, of course, all that matters. Tremayne is very good to you, isn't he?"

"Of course, he is goodness itself."

"And is it as good as you thought it would be?"

"What does that mean? I don't remember what I did think then. I have had a splendid time, and Geoffrey just lives to make me happy."

"And now?" asked Cassillis softly with his blue eyes upon her. "Is it still the same? I can't somehow imagine Tremayne being any woman's slave, though he is very much in love with you. Do you know, Iris, I made a curious blunder, and you did not enlighten me in Grindelwald. I had no idea he was in love with you."

Iris blushed painfully. "I didn't know it myself," she returned in a low voice. "If I had known it I should not have married him. There is a limit, Julian, and I would not have faced it."

"On his account?"

"Yes. I am not good, Julian. I am worldly, and mean, and petty, and—and I know all I have been to you both, but I wouldn't have deceived a man who really cared for me had I known. I thought he was marrying me for my father's sake, to look after me. I did not guess. Oh, well, I suppose we shall get through somehow."

"I wish he wouldn't make me come here like this." Cassillis got up. "I didn't want to come. I hate it, and don't mind telling you so. Don't you think we ought to go down? Where is he?"

"Writing. He is always so busy, and it's a pleasure for me to have some one to talk to. And you are not

in love with me now, Julian, so don't be silly. We have outgrown it, both of us."

He looked at her then, angry. "I have not," he answered. "And I never shall. Oh, come along. Let's go down to the music-room as this place is too hot, don't you think?—" He went across the room and opened the door. Iris followed, and outside they met Tremayne.

He looked surprised and not too pleased.

"What are you doing up here?" he demanded.

"We have been having tea," answered Iris, rather taken aback. "Why? Would you like some? There is plenty left."

"Tea is usually served in the drawing-room, isn't it?"

"I like it up here. It's—it's warmer, and now Julian is going to sing to me."

In her nervousness she forgot to call him "Mr. Cassillis," and ran rather quickly downstairs. Cassillis followed her, and Tremayne brought up the rear. He looked distinctly out of humour and Julian, quick to notice it, felt wretched. As a result he sang badly, so badly, in fact, that Tremayne was disgusted, told him so, and stopped the song, at which Cassillis flung down the music and went out of the room, leaving his host and hostess staring after him.

They did not see him again until dinner, when, with his most charming smile, he apologized to them for his sudden temper.

Tremayne took the apology with a pleasant word, his own bad humour quite gone, but Iris did not speak nor look up, for she knew the cause.

After dinner, when they were alone, Tremayne asked Cassillis again what the matter was.

"It may be only nerves," he said, "but I have the impression it is more than that. You have not been the same since last winter when you came over to London. You were not at all your old self, neither then nor when we saw you in Rome. In fact, you

didn't look a bit pleased to see me on that occasion, and I wondered why."

Cassillis laughed it off, and said it was only nerves and he would be all right when he had settled down in London.

"Not in debt, are you?" asked Tremayne.

"Oh no, I have plenty of money. You give me a most generous allowance. I'm sorry I worry you. I didn't want to come back, you know, that's partly it. I should like to have gone on to Rome."

"Why, is there a woman in Rome you want to see?"

There was no reply to that, and Tremayne got up from the table, struck a match to light his cigar, so that the light of the flame fell on the young man's face.

"Well?" he asked. "Who is she?"

"There is no 'she.' There's no woman I care two straws for in Rome, nor in Vienna."

"Nor anywhere? Now, you can't tell me that and speak the truth."

There was a perceptible hesitation, then—

"No, I can't say that, but I didn't know it was obvious."

Tremayne smiled tolerantly. "Very obvious, especially when you sing. But why is it a secret? I guessed it was a woman, it usually is; and you are the sort that women will always run after, especially Lady Hammond and her kind"—he shrugged his shoulders with a half-contemptuous gesture. "I was always afraid you would go that way, but if that is the trouble, let me hear."

"I am sorry I can't tell you," said Cassillis gently.

"I am not in any sort of scrape; it's not that."

"You're in some sort of trouble, and too proud to own it. And I am afraid you are not the sort to run straight, Julian. But you are wrong not to tell me, whatever it is. I would help and advise you, and I am a man of the world."

Cassillis put his head on his hands and would not look up. He longed, like Iris, to tell the truth, and clear his guilty conscience, but he dare not, for he, too, knew it would be the one thing that Tremayne would never forgive. Even his momentary displeasure this afternoon showed how merciless he would be where his adored wife was concerned, and to him——

Cassillis was very young, too young as yet to realize much beyond himself, and he did not want to quarrel with Tremayne whom he loved and respected, so he was silent.

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But the little seed was sown.

The following evening Cassillis was practising before dinner, and hearing him as he passed through the hall, Tremayne paused to listen. It was only February and already quite dark.

“Singing jolly well!” thought Tremayne, listening to the powerful voice rivalling the wind without, as it had done long ago. He went down the passage to the music-room. “Singing to himself, evidently, and he always sings best alone.”

The door of the music-room was closed by a patent arrangement, which opened and closed noiselessly so as not to disturb the performers, and he stepped silently into the room.

The piano was at the further end, and only one light over it was switched on. At the end, near the door, was a collection of cane chairs and a high-backed couch behind which Tremayne stood to listen unseen.

Cassillis was singing an old song, “Nirvana,” which he had found at Trelawn, and it occurred to the elder man that he had never heard him sing better in his most difficult selections. But he was not alone, as he had thought.

Looking down over the back of the couch he saw that Iris was curled up in the corner of it, right in the shadow, and the boy was singing to the girl. His eyes were fixed, not on the music, but upon her.

"I have knelt in the mighty temples
But the dumb gods make no sign,
They cannot speak to my spirit
As thy soul speaks to mine.
And the priests talk of Nirvana,
And weave their mystic charms,
I only know Nirvana
Within thy loving arms—"

A cold shiver went over Tremayne as he listened, and within, ever so softly, the devil asked a question,

"Could a man sing a song like that to a woman unless he felt it and wanted her?"

Cassillis was an actor, of course—he admitted it—but these two thought they were alone, and how far therefore was he acting, and why should he act for Iris?

"For we shall be one, Belovèd,
In the stream of life divine,
As the river flows to the ocean
My soul, my soul shall flow to thine!"

There was a hush after the last chord was struck. Iris looked transfigured, her eyes were shining, and her face was rapt and flushed as Tremayne had never seen it before.

Then suddenly she saw him, and came down to earth.

"Lovely, wasn't it?" she exclaimed with her ordinary manner. "Did you ever hear Julian sing better, Geoffrey?"

"Never," answered Tremayne with rather a forced smile. "Not even at a concert. You must have bewitched him, my dear child. You are singing just as well to-night, Julian, as you sang badly last night. And you are a good actor, too, for you looked and sounded as if you meant and felt every word."

Cassillis had got up from the piano-stool, but he

did not speak. Tremayne noticed it. Neither would he sing again.

The following day he went back to town, but unfortunately Tremayne could not forget the incident.

CHAPTER XIX

TREMAYNE bought his adored wife a little car in the spring, one she could drive herself, and one of the Trelawn chauffeurs gave her driving lessons.

This was very much to her pleasure, but turned out to be a short-lived joy.

The car came in March—in April came the deluge; the heavens fell, and Iris's beautiful coloured bubble burst.

That was on the day when the doctor came to Trelawn, and told Tremayne that he might reasonably expect an heir in September, adding that there need be no anxiety on the husband's part with such a perfectly healthy, normal, little wife.

Perhaps that was why, in talking it over with Iris after he had gone, he did not adopt any pitying, nor even sympathetic, manner.

He said, "I am very glad. I have always wanted a son."

One of the most aggrieved ladies in the world sat in her Dresden china sitting-room and wept.

"But you promised me I should not have children."

"My darling girl, how could I have made such a promise? I didn't know what would happen, and one child is not children. Do you mean to say you are not pleased? Don't you want one? I thought women always loved babies."

"I don't. I hate the idea, and it isn't fair; you ought to have told me. I didn't know, and I don't want it. I hate the thought of being ill. I have never been ill in my life."

"But you won't be ill," answered Tremayne soothingly. "The doctor assures me you are perfectly strong, and ought to have no complications at all."

"But I shall be tied here all the summer, not able to go up to town as you promised me I should, and I shall not be able to have visitors nor anything! It's too hateful. I shall look ghastly. I hate women who—well, look like that and——"

"Oh, my dear, don't go on like that." Tremayne looked hurt, then—

"I am sorry you feel that way about it, but it was unforeseen. I will see you have everything for your comfort and the time will soon pass. You can still drive if you will be careful, and not go out alone. I am very glad. I want an heir to Trelawn, and your children should be beautiful."

But Iris was inconsolable. She even went to the length, in her temper, of telling him she would not have a baby if she could help it, which although, of course, the emptiest of threats, annoyed him.

"Don't talk like that!" he exclaimed sternly. "It is downright wicked of you. You will love the child when you have it, or have you no maternal instinct?"

"It's your fault," she repeated. "And I don't want it."

After that Tremayne went out of the room and left the subject alone.

For a week or two Iris went about in probably the worst temper she had ever indulged in. She was furious, as well as aggrieved, for it was just the one thing which had not entered into her calculations. Tremayne had spoken vaguely of the day when there might be "heirs" to Trelawn, but she had never taken him seriously, probably because she was very ignorant on these matters. She had never known her mother, her grandmother was old and old-fashioned, and no one had ever told her anything.

Now she realized it to the full, and knew there was no way out. She would be shut up in Trelawn all the summer, and very probably Julian Cassillis would come down and know all about it, which was almost the worst thought of all.

Tremayne did, in fact, suggest that Cassillis should come down very soon after they knew, thinking he might amuse her, but she flatly refused to have him.

"If you bring Julian here, I will go to bed, and I won't get up until he has gone!"

"You are very unreasonable, Iris," he answered impatiently. "No one could possibly tell what is the matter with you, and it's absurd. Besides there is nothing to be ashamed of, is there? You are married to me, and it is natural for you to have children."

"It may be natural, but that doesn't make it more decent," retorted Iris. "And I think it's horrible. You won't let me do anything. Why shouldn't I drive alone? Yet Benson told me yesterday you had given orders I was not to go out in my car by myself. Why not?"

"I don't want you to run any risks at present, and you are not proficient in driving yet."

"I hate Benson, and it's no fun driving alone with him. I can't take any one else, and you told me the car was for my own use."

"It will be, later on, but just now you must be patient. I have to go up to town to-day, but I will come back as early as I can and take you for a drive this evening if you do not want to go out with Benson."

He was only a man, and he did not understand, although he loved her devotedly. He was grieved at her temper and moods, and did not even leave her alone, as he might wisely have done.

"It is only for a few months," he said again, as he got up to go. "Take Benson, and go for a nice drive; don't be silly!" he added. "It's a lovely day, and will do you good,"

Iris did not answer. She sat and stared, thinking of his last words—"only for a few months"; they seemed like years to her. And back again came Julian's words, spoken that night at Grindelwald: "You'll pay, he'll make you pay, and you'll pay all your life for what you are doing!"

She was paying now, so she thought, recollecting all her dreams, and how little they had come true. Julian had known better than she what it would be, but she would not listen to him.

It is not given to every woman to understand alike, nor to anticipate motherhood with the same joy. It was not the baby. She would have liked the baby, but she did not want the trouble of having it.

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She waited till she heard Tremayne drive away; then, still out of temper, she ordered her little car.

When she came down ready for the drive, it was at the door, and the chauffeur was waiting with it.

"You need not come," she told him. "I am going to drive myself."

The man looked doubtful and kept his foot on the step while he repeated his master's orders that she was not to go out alone.

"They are not my orders," she answered sharply. "And I don't want you, so stand away, please."

"My master would blame me if anything happened to you, madam, and I had better come."

"I am neither a child nor a lunatic!" retorted Iris. "Complain to Mr. Tremayne if you like when he returns, but stand away now, please," and without waiting for a reply, she shot in the clutch and the lever to second speed, and tore away down the drive.

The man stared after her with a gloomy look.

"That's done it," he remarked to the butler. "That's as much as my place is worth, and I might as well go and look for another. If anything does happen to her——"

And on that particular day something did happen. Iris was not driving well. She was nervous, and the girl acquaintance whom she took with her made her worse. They went into Oxford for lunch, did some shopping there, and started back about four.

Something was wrong with the engine. It was probably quite a small matter, but she did not understand the car sufficiently well to locate the trouble at once, and it delayed them a long time before they could start again. That necessitated haste, for however angry and sore she was, Iris was too much afraid of her husband not to wish to be back inside the gates of Trelawn before he returned from London.

She raced down the last hill at thirty miles an hour, and met a country man driving a trap slowly up the road, a white woolly dog trailing leisurely after him.

And in the manner of country dogs, it suddenly took a fancy to the centre of the road and sat down to rest.

"Mind the dog!" cried Iris's companion.

She put on the foot brake, swerving violently to avoid the animal, and leaned forward to pull back the hand brake. But the sudden swerve sent her foolishly shod foot off the brake on to the accelerator before she found the other. In a moment the little car was flying down the hill.

Her companion screamed, but Iris only said: "Shut up!" and hunted with hands and feet for the pedals and brake which in this moment of emergency appeared to have disappeared altogether. So had all her teaching in the art of driving; she knew that if she could get to the foot of the hill all right, the rise on the other side would stop the car, but there was another tradesman's cart coming towards her, and a bicycle in the distance.

It was all the work of a few moments. She swerved to avoid the cart, missed the bicycle by an inch, turned to look at the boy who was riding it, because he fell off, and ran the car over the side of the road into

a deep grassy ditch, where she dropped her bonnet into the mud, as a dog drops his nose on to his paws, and with a last protesting snort was still.

Iris was flung completely over the screen and on to the grass, and the girl at her side missed the same fate only because she fell to the bottom of the car to protect herself from the shattered screen.

And just then Tremayne himself came upon the scene, driving home from the station. He had been worried and anxious about his wife, and had telephoned for the car to meet him an hour earlier than he usually arrived.

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Iris did not appear hurt when they helped her out of the ditch, neither by a lucky chance was the car. The wings were bent, the lamps smashed, and the screen broken, but the engine was undamaged and she soon started up when they got her back on to the road.

Tremayne said very little. He sent the girl friend home in his own car, with the chauffeur who had been driving with him, and himself drove Iris to Trelawn in her car.

Benson came to meet them as they drew up, and opened the door.

"Why were you not with your mistress?" demanded Tremayne.

"Madam wished to drive alone, sir," answered the man.

"But you had my orders that madam was not to drive alone."

"I could not help it, sir."

"You disobeyed my orders then. Come in tomorrow morning and I will pay you off."

The man looked at Iris. Trelawn was a good place, and he did not want to lose it; but she took no notice, so he said, "Yes sir, very good, sir," and no more.

Tremayne followed Iris into the hall.

"Sure you are not hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"You had better get a bath, and I will send you up some brandy. You look very white and shaken."

She protested that she was all right, but he was alarmed, too alarmed to be as angry as he might have been.

"You might have killed yourself," he told her, as he helped her upstairs to her rooms. "How could you do such a thing? Especially after I had forbidden you to go out alone. What possessed you, Iris?"

"Why shouldn't I go if I want to? I'm not your slave, and I shall do what I like. I told you I shouldn't take Benson."

"Then you will not drive again," answered Tremayne sharply. "Your car shall be sold and Benson will be sacked for his share in it. I am not sure you did not do it on purpose, you know. You have hinted at it more than once."

Iris went into her room and sat down. She even tried to laugh.

"You said you did not want a child, but you might have killed yourself as well."

"How frightfully funny you are!" She did laugh then. "I never thought of that."

She was seemingly little the worse, and much as he longed to do so, Tremayne could neither shake nor beat her for her foolishness. He left her and went down to a solitary dinner which he did not eat.

At ten o'clock Iris's maid came down and asked him to send for the doctor.

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"I suppose this has done it," observed Tremayne to the doctor in the very early morning, standing drinking tea in Iris's sitting-room. "There is not a chance of it going through now?"

"Not a chance," was the reply. "And you are lucky your wife is so strong. She might have killed herself as well."

Tremayne had been up all night. There was nothing he could do, but he would not have slept if he had

gone to bed, and more than once she had asked for him, though she had sworn to herself she would not.

Once she begged him: "Don't dismiss Benson, Geoffrey, please. It was not his fault. He did want to come, but I would not have him."

He would have done anything for her in this hour, and promised readily, begging to know if there were nothing else he could do for her.

She shook her head and told him: "No. It's my own fault, though indeed I didn't do it on purpose. But don't blame Benson——" and she caught at his hand. "It wasn't Julian's fault, it was mine."

In the stress of the moment Tremayne did not notice the slip, but afterward his astute mind called it to memory, as he paced up and down her sitting-room after the doctor had taken his place.

"I wonder why she mixed up Cassillis and Benson?" he asked himself. "She seemed sensible enough, but Benson's name is David."

CHAPTER XX

IT was June before Iris was better, and the roses were blooming at Trelawn.

They had never referred to the subject again. Tremayne had been kindness itself to her while she lay ill, but when it was over the disappointment remained, and he was bitter. He wanted a son, but she did not, and it was her fault whether she intended it or not.

Looking back on the last year he was more bitter still, for he remembered all his dreams and hopes ; all that he had wanted to give her, and the happiness that he had planned for them both. And everything had failed.

Iris had never cared for him. He was only her father's friend, and she had never learnt to look upon him as lover or husband. He supposed, in his bitterness, that she had been too young, and that he ought to have waited until she understood.

So, though he was kind and tender to her in her convalescence, there was a perceptible shadow between them. She did not gain strength again as she ought to have done, and did not seem to care.

"Is she happy?" asked the doctor once, and Tremayne was forced to answer: "Not very happy, I am afraid," for it was obvious that she was not.

They went away, but that did not improve matters although Mrs. Humphreys, the most cheery of companions, accompanied them. After a fortnight Iris asked if they might go home.

It was then the middle of June, and they were cutting the hay in the meadows round Trelawn.

"We must have some visitors now, to cheer you a little," said Tremayne after a day or two. "It is a pity Mrs. Humphreys could not stay, but no doubt she will return, and I want Cassillis to come down. It is a long time since he was here. Shall I ask him next week-end?"

Iris showed no enthusiasm. She answered: "If you like, but I am not dull. I am glad to be home again, and I have you."

"I am not a very gay companion for you," he returned with rather a twisted smile. "I am poor company myself at present. You must go on with your driving lessons now." But Iris felt she never wished to drive again.

The following day Tremayne went up to London, and told Iris at dinner that he had seen Cassillis and he was coming down for a week.

"He is not looking well either, and the change will do him good. You would like him to come, wouldn't you?"

Iris did not look up, but she answered, "Yes, of course," and wished he would not look at her as she said it.

"I am rather worried about Julian," he added slowly. "There is something wrong with him. He won't tell me, but I fancy some woman has got hold of him. He is an attractive boy, with his good looks and his voice. He has never confided in you, I suppose?"

"I have hardly seen him since he came home."

"Then you couldn't know, of course." He sighed a little and got up. "You look tired. You had better go to bed; you are not strong yet."

Iris took no notice. She was sitting by the wide-opened window, for the night was hot. She did not feel that she would sleep if she went to bed, and she began to think about Julian's coming,

How nice it would have been if they could have been friends, as they ought to have been, without that everlasting remembrance between them.

"I don't want to go to bed," she found herself saying, "I would rather stay and talk to you."

"Go on then, what do you want to say? Is anything wrong?"

"No."

"Are you unhappy about anything? I often think you are."

"Only when I think you have not forgiven me, and are still angry with me for that stupid accident. I didn't intend to do it, but sometimes I think you still believe I did."

"It was a great disappointment to me," answered Tremayne evasively. "But of course, I have forgiven you long ago."

She got up, and in passing his chair, laid her cheek on his dark head. "You are much too good to me, Geoffrey. I—I—believe you would forgive me anything. Would—would you?"

"That's rather a tall order!" he smiled. "I might not."

"What would you not forgive?"

"Well, I shouldn't forgive you if you preferred another man and left me for him."

"I don't think I am likely to do that. What else?"

He tried to see her, but she kept behind his chair; then with a swift movement she came and knelt beside him, laying her head on his knees. "I ought to be very grateful to you," she murmured, "and I am. I only wish I could show you that I mean it."

He put his arm round her, drawing her close. "I don't want any gratitude. I want your love."

"Do you still love me, Geoffrey?"

"You know I do."

"Very much?"

“Yes. Why ask such a question? What is the matter with you to-night? Tell me——”

She did not tell him, because she did not know, but she leaned against him, and closed her eyes.

He thought then that he knew, and his pulses leapt and throbbed like hammers. She was in his arms—his—at last, and for the first time he kissed her, and knew she wanted him to.

Iris knew it too, and the thought terrified her, because now she could never never tell him, and the past would remain a secret between them for ever. She lay in his arms and found a certain peace there; not the peace that comes with the perfect love which casts out fear, but the peace of a woman who knows that she has found her mate.

Tremayne held her close, afraid to move lest he should waken and find it a dream. It was a heaven, and yet he, too, knew there was a shadow in it.

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CHAPTER XXI

ON Saturday Julian Cassillis came down to Trelawn. Tremayne met him again with his big open car, and was most cordial in his greeting.

Cassillis knew, of course, that Iris had been ill, and that was why he had not been asked to Trelawn before, but he knew nothing beyond the bare fact that there had been an accident to her car.

He had spent a miserable summer, discontented with his work, and unhappy in his life. He would not have gone to Trelawn from choice, for he hated the barrier which had arisen between him and the man he loved more than any one in the world.

"Iris is depressed and lonely," observed Tremayne, as they drove along the country road. "She is not strong yet, and I hope you will cheer her up."

"I am not very bright myself," replied Cassillis. "I work so hard, and I don't get much society except in the profession."

"You talk as if you were on the stage." Tremayne was amused. "Why *the* profession?"

"I wish I were. I do wish you would let me go on the stage." The young man grew bold with desire, once the subject was opened.

"Did I tell you Calvey, of the Star Theatre, has been after me? He came to see me. I have met him several times, and he wants me to join his company, and promises to star me if I will."

Tremayne shrugged his shoulders. "A dog's life, my dear Julian," he said, "and not much to be proud of even when you reach the top of the tree."

"It would be quicker than this. I ought to be earning money now instead of still studying. I am twenty-four, you know, and I do want to make my name and get on now."

"You have plenty of time. Even if you became an opera singer, you are too young for the principal parts, and you would only strain and injure your voice. Your health also would probably suffer, because it is hard work. Wait a little time, Julian."

"Of course I must, if you say so," said Julian dispiritedly, "though I wish you would just let me try light opera. Calvey offered me a good part if I would join his first company and go on tour with 'Fancy Fair,' his latest star piece."

"Where did you meet Calvey to hear all this?" asked Tremayne suspiciously. "You seem to know him pretty well."

"At Lady Hammond's. He said that to me on Sunday last."

"Were you at the Hammonds last Sunday, at St. John's Wood?"

"No, at Everling, their country house."

"You never told me you had been to Everling. When did you start that?"

Julian went rather red. "I have only been twice. I didn't care about it, but they asked me—she asked me, I mean, so often and it seemed ungrateful to refuse."

"How did you go?"

"Calvey drove me down on Sunday. Before that Lady Hammond drove me."

"I would much rather you did not go to the Hammonds at all, whether in town or at Everling," said Tremayne in a hard voice. "They can do you no good, Julian, and are not the sort of friends I should choose for you."

"I am sorry, but I must go somewhere on Sundays. Langley is always in church and——"

"Why don't you come here?" he asked in astonish-

ment. "Trelawn is open to you, and I am always asking you, but you tell me you are busy, or want to stay and work. What is the truth? If you have time to go to Everling for the week-end, you have time to come here, especially if you are lonely."

Julian did not answer; he knew he had made a mistake, and, afraid to plunge deeper, he said nothing more.

When they came to Trelawn they found Iris waiting for them on the terrace. She was lying listlessly in a long cane chair full of cushions, dressed in white, with a crimson rose at her belt and a green ribbon through her many curls.

The roses were climbing round, and all along the rails of the terrace, ivy-leaved geraniums and wine-coloured fuchsias were rioting with deep-hued cherry-pie.

Julian was not comfortable at Trelawn, and not sure of himself. He looked at the flowers and the cushions of the chair, thinking what a picture they made, but he did not look at his hostess, because he could not trust his eyes with Tremayne standing at his side.

He was silent and nervous throughout tea, till she, too, infected by his manner, grew quiet; her eyes shadowed and veiled themselves, and a little flush came into her too pale cheeks, till Tremayne (the devil prompting him) watched them and began again to wonder—and wonder——

After tea Julian went off to change, but Tremayne lingered by Iris's side.

"Julian will be here all the week, Iris," he said. "Do not spoil him, will you? I know you enjoy his company, and his singing is a joy to both of us, but I do not want him to be conceited."

Iris did not look up. "I don't think Julian is at all conceited, nor likely to become so. He is extremely modest considering his great gifts, but he cannot help being attractive," which remark did not tend to make Tremayne more easy in his mind.

Iris was his now, very much his, but he was still afraid of losing her.

When Julian came down before dinner Iris was on the terrace, dressed and ready, and all trace of the shadow had disappeared. She welcomed him with a dazzling smile and offered him a rose-bud for a button-hole.

"You are really better now?" he asked, making conversation. "You must have had a bad smash with your car. You were very ill, were you not? Lucky that you were not scarred, wasn't it? Mr. Tremayne must have been awfully alarmed."

"He was awfully angry, too," she laughed, making light of it. "He was simply furious with me. You see, I had been forbidden to go out alone. What sort of a rose would you like? There's a darling pink bud there which would just suit you. Geoffrey won't wear flowers, he says they are effeminate, but they suit you, though I don't mean you are effeminate. But you are an artist."

"Call me an actor while you are about it." There was a touch of bitterness in his voice. "I'd like to be one, too, if Mr. Tremayne would only allow it. But he won't, and as I am still dependent upon him, I can do nothing. I want to go on the stage."

"Geoffrey hates the stage; I don't know why. I should think you would make a very good actor, Julian. You are so good-looking, apart from your voice."

Julian reddened, and yet there was neither flattery nor coquetry in her tone; it was rather the remark of a girl friend who had a genuine affection for him. She did not even look at him as she spoke, for she was busy at the moment placing a rose-bud in his button-hole.

He said "Thank you," and added, "I ought to call you Mrs. Tremayne, I suppose."

"Why? We have always called each other by our Christian names."

"It's different for you. Tremayne calls me Julian,

but I don't think he would care about my calling his wife Iris."

"Don't be silly!" she flashed at him. "Do try and make this week a success, Julian. You can if you like; it rests with you, and I will do my best. Geoffrey has asked you often, and wanted you to come. Now, for my sake, be nice to him."

Julian stared at the ground. "It's all very well for you," he said gloomily, "but it's not so easy for me. You don't care—you never did—but I did, and to me the thing is—damnable!" And then he added, half-ashamed, "I beg your pardon, I ought not to have said that, but I can't help it. I can't forget——" He was speaking jerkily, and suddenly he broke off, for a step sounded behind and Tremayne stepped out through the window.

"Oh, you are there!" he exclaimed. "The gong has sounded, and I was looking for you. Is anything the matter, Julian?" He looked from one to the other. "You look—upset. What is it?"

"Nothing, thanks," answered Julian mechanically, but Iris said nothing.

"Well then, shall we go in to dinner?" asked Tremayne, a trifle impatiently. "There is nothing that I know of to wait for."

That night the devil of jealousy came and whispered again in Tremayne's ear: "What was Julian saying to Iris on the terrace, and why did they look upset? Why did he break it off so suddenly, and what was 'damnable'?"

And now the seed sown in February began to grow, and it grew so quickly that it alarmed Tremayne himself. Little things began to be magnified, little whispers repeated themselves in his ears, till by degrees a chain was woven of indisputable evidence; woven link by link.

He loved Iris with all that was best in him, but he was of a jealous nature and intolerant. He never forgot that he was nearly twenty years older than she,

and that he was (in this instance) cursed with money enough to tempt even a good girl. And it still seemed to him impossible, even with her new tenderness for him, that she had learnt his lesson and was not only giving him gratitude.

It had really begun in February, but looking back now, he remembered the meetings of these two, as girl and boy, in Hendley—the meetings and the letters that he had stopped. He remembered that they had met and stayed in the same hotel in Switzerland, when he was not there, and he had never known what had taken place; and he remembered Cassillis's changed manner when he joined him in London.

And as the thought grew, like a canker, he began to doubt that Iris had ever regarded him other than as a source of money and protection, and as a necessary evil, prescribed by her father.

But she was his wife, and Tremayne would have killed her before he would have let another man have her.

Cassillis had been singing to her that evening in February when he came unexpectedly into the music-room; they had been up in her sitting-room for God only knew how long that Sunday afternoon.

And now every little act became a crime. Every time they looked at each other he saw evil in their eyes, and every word they spoke which he did not actually hear he construed into a secret.

It was the first time in his life that he had suffered the torments of jealousy, and in those few days he understood all the feelings of poor Othello as he saw his beautiful Desdemona with a young and handsome man, himself nearly twenty years older, and utterly enslaved by her youth and beauty.

Once when he was supposed to be writing letters he went out of his study to fetch something from his bedroom, and from the stairs he heard the boy calling Iris. When he was there, Julian always

called her "Mrs. Tremayne" most carefully. "Iris, come out for a walk—do!" Julian was saying. "It's a lovely night."

From his library windows he watched them go down the gardens. They even crossed the lawn in full view of the house, Julian's hand on her arm; and Tremayne longed to choke the boy he loved.

Once, coming unexpectedly into the room, he found Julian holding Iris's hand. She was drawing, and he was evidently guiding her in a difficult bit, but he took his hand away and got up at once.

"Julian is giving me a drawing lesson," said Iris lightly. "I wish I could draw like he does."

"Really," answered Tremayne dryly. "If you wish to take drawing lessons you can, but you have never expressed a wish before in that direction; and I should prefer Julian to employ himself otherwise than in teaching you. It looks hardly the thing for him to sit and hold your hand like that; servants might come in, and they talk."

Again, he found Julian wrapping a cloak rather too lovingly round Iris one evening as they were starting for their usual stroll in the gardens. He took the cloak from him. "Thank you, Julian," he remarked in the same dry tone, "my wife has a maid, and I also am at her service." And Cassillis wondered what on earth he had done, and why Tremayne had so suddenly taken up this attitude.

It was entirely unfounded now, for neither he nor Iris had a wrong thought in their heads. When they were together they talked of music, of his work and future, his dreams, and of Tremayne. Iris was full of Tremayne now, and he might with safety and a good deal of shame have heard every word, but he did not; he chose, instead, to be very busy in the evenings, and left his wife to entertain his guest.

Before the end of the week the whole situation became intolerable, and Cassillis went to Iris and told her so,

They walked down the garden and discussed it frankly.

"What is the matter with him?" he asked. "Is he jealous of me?"

"If he is, it's very silly of him. I don't know what it is."

"Have you told him anything?"

"My dear Julian, if I had do you suppose he would have asked you here, and been as nice to you as he is?"

"I don't know his game, but he is suspicious of something. He watches us like a cat with a mouse, and he never did it before. I can't help thinking he knows something."

"But how could he? Who could tell him?"

"I don't care what you say, he is jealous. I'm not a fool—I can see it."

There was a seat at the end of the long path where the roses grew, and Iris sat down.

"I am very sick of having a secret like this from Geoffrey," she said wearily. "He has never been the same since I was ill. He was frightfully disappointed and angry with me."

"Disappointed!" echoed Julian. "What do you mean?"

She coloured and hesitated at her slip; then she told him in rather a shamed voice:

"I was going to have a baby, and I didn't want it. I didn't mean to be wicked, but I could not help feeling as I did, that I had never really been young and had a good time. And I didn't want to be tied at home all my life and get old——"

He did not speak. He had guessed since his last visit that Tremayne was not the slave that she assumed he would be, but he had never thought of this.

"I wish I had told him all about us long ago," said Iris. "But I can't do it now; it's too late."

"Then let me do it." He sat on the edge of the garden table at her side, and did not realize that from

the library windows they were faintly visible. If he had known it would not have made any difference, as far as he was concerned, at that moment.

"Let me go and tell him now and get it over," he repeated. "I'll make him understand, and he'll forgive you if he cares for you. A man always does if he cares enough."

Iris shook her head. "Geoffrey would not forgive. I know him. No, you must not tell him, Julian. It would break my heart now—if I didn't care it would be different, but I do."

"I won't tell, of course. I promised; but I think I'm going back to town. I can't stand this any longer." He caught up her hand and kissed it. "Iris, I'm sorry!"

"It's not your fault. We couldn't help it. And you promise?"

"Yes, you can trust me——" He did not finish, nor wait for an answer, but went across the grass back to the house.

Tremayne was standing on the terrace. "Where is Iris?"

"I left her in the garden," replied Julian, confused.

"Alone? And it is dark."

"I will go back and fetch her. We—I—we thought perhaps you would come out, and I came to fetch you—to see——"

"Thank you," said Tremayne politely and dryly. "I am honoured."

Later on that night, when Iris had gone to her room, Julian met Tremayne again and broached the subject of leaving. Tremayne listened with a cold smile. "Certainly not," he said. "Why should you go? You have cancelled your lessons for this week, and have nothing to do in town. And Iris likes to have you."

He saw the young man wince with pleasure, and went on. "And it is not polite to want to leave after five days when you came for nine! Iris and I

are glad of visitors; she is bored to death with me."

There was no reply, for Cassillis had no other excuse ready.

"I am poor company at present," went on the smooth voice. "I had hoped to have an heir to Trelawn in the autumn, but it has not come off. Iris's accident finished all my hopes. She was glad. She did not want it, but I did——"

He waited, and Julian knew he was waiting, and made the worst reply possible. "Yes, I know," he said. "Iris told me."

This time Tremayne looked at him—stared at him, in fact.

"What made her tell you? She has been most anxious to keep it a secret, and did not want you to come here."

Cassillis began to lose his head a little, not seeing the drift of the question. "I don't know," he stammered. "She was telling me, that's all," and afraid of putting his foot deeper into it, he went out of the room without a word of excuse.

* * * * *

Determined now to let them "hang themselves," Tremayne left them to have tea alone the following afternoon, and came in about six o'clock to hear Cassillis singing in the music-room.

He went down the terrace to enter through the long window, wondering in his uncontrollable jealousy where his wife was, yet knowing perfectly well that he would find her there.

Julian was singing an old song he did not know:—

"Once, dear love, we went a-maying,
Full of joy in the newborn spring,
And the lark rose above our heads
As it trilled on its airy wing.

Our hearts were light as the lark's gay song
As we roam'd thro' woods the whole day long.
Ah love! do you remember those days of long ago?
When my fond heart its secret told,
When first I felt I lov'd you so."

He stood and listened, tortured with the fires of jealousy.

"Ah! the happy hours fled all too fast,
In the joyous bliss of that sweet past.
Ah love! do you remember those days of long ago?"

* * * * *

"They did go too fast, didn't they?" remarked Julian, when the last chord was struck. "So fast that it seems impossible now that they ever happened."

"I'm afraid I have too good a memory. I wish I could forget," returned Iris sadly. "But they were very happy all the same. Now sing 'The Rosary.'"

Tremayne leaned on the rail of the terrace. He felt like the spy he knew himself to be, but he did not care. He just knew that he had got to get to the bottom of it.

Julian tried "The Rosary," but it was not a success and they both laughed. "I can't sing that," he declared. "I'm not religious enough, and I loathe memories. I'd rather have something present——" Then he saw Tremayne standing in the doorway, and got up instantly from the music-stool.

"Sing 'Nirvana,'" suggested the elder man unkindly, "and I will play it for you. You are no pianist, Julian."

"I know," answered Julian. "I don't like it, and if I went on the stage it would not be necessary. And I could not possibly sing 'Nirvana' to-day, so please do not ask me. I was only practising, and Iris came in——" He bit his lip, cursing himself for his slip in calling her Iris, but they were so confused by Tremayne's sudden appearance that both he and Iris lost their heads and scarcely knew what they said.

"Yes, but I want you to sing 'Nirvana,'" repeated Tremayne. "Once you sang it very well, I remember, and I have a fancy to hear you sing it again, so come along——"

Julian looked at him, and their eyes met. "No,"

he said, "I will not. I will sing what I like or I won't sing at all!"

At another time Tremayne would have admired his spirit. As it was, he hated it, and the young man's resolve not to be led into an admission. Julian saw Tremayne's plan, and he was going to put up a fight for what was left to him of honour. He had given his word to Iris, and meant to keep it, although he disapproved of her silence.

He put down the music and, as once before, went out of the room. He was determined now to go back to London on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXII

IN the morning at the breakfast table Tremayne asked Julian to motor with him into Oxford. It was almost as if he had guessed the young man's intention to slip back to London, and Julian had no excuse to offer for not accompanying his host. He said a very ungracious "Thanks," and wondered what to do.

He went down to the music-room afterwards, and stayed there until it was nearly time to go; then he went and found Tremayne, and begged to be excused for not accompanying him as he wanted to practise some special song. If he had not been so agitated he might have noticed that Tremayne did not even look surprised. He merely said:

"Just as you like. I shall lunch in Oxford, so you and Iris need not wait for me."

There was a train about two o'clock, Cassillis recollected. He had left by it before, and he could walk the mile to the station, for go he must; when his bag was packed he went off to find Iris and say good-bye, just before lunch.

She was cutting roses on the terrace near the library window, and he set down his bag and went across to her.

"I am going back to town, Iris; I've come to say good-bye."

"I thought you had gone into Oxford with Geoffrey. I heard him ask you——"

"Yes, but it was an opportunity to get away, so I made an excuse. If I tell him, he won't let me go,

and I can't stand this any longer. I hate this horrible suspicion, and I know he is jealous, so I'm off."

Iris sat on the arm of a chair and laid her scissors down.

"And you are going to leave me to it? Oh, Julian!"

"He'll be all right with you alone. He adores you."

"Not lately; I think he hates me. I can't understand him, for you and I are only friends, whatever we have been, and it's so ridiculous."

"Perhaps; but there it is. I don't pretend friendship towards you, but I'm not such a cad as to talk of anything else now that you are his wife, neither am I so disloyal to him; but I'm not going to stay to be baited like this, and I'm not coming back until he feels differently, or until you tell him the plain truth."

She did not answer, but tears overflowed and lay on her cheeks like dewdrops. Cassillis saw them and swore.

He came and sat down, taking her hands in his. "Oh, I say, don't cry," he begged. "Everything is beastly, isn't it? I wish you had married me, as you ought to have done. Iris, why didn't you come? Or, why didn't you tell Tremayne? Let me do it—but don't cry over it. I hate to see you cry and I hate having to leave you like this. I say, Iris——"

The words froze upon his lips, and he dropped her hands abruptly and got up. A little distance away, outside the window, Tremayne was standing watching them.

Instinctively Julian hoped that he had heard everything, which would save any explanation.

"Very interesting," said Tremayne gently. "I thought I should find you here."

"How long have you been there?" demanded Julian.

"Long enough to hear all I wanted. I came back for some papers I forgot."

"You did not. You came back to see what we were doing."

Iris sprang to her feet, as white as a pearl. She said, "Julian——" And then, "Julian is going back to town," she added to Tremayne. "He thinks you do not want him here and came to say good-bye to me, that's all."

"I think it is time he went," returned Tremayne, "though it is not quite the thing for a guest to leave the house in his host's absence; neither is it usual for his hostess to cry when he goes. However, he has not yet gone, so now we are all here perhaps you will explain to me, Cassillis, what it is you are so anxious I should know, and what your secret with my wife consists of. Has it anything to do with the information I overheard just now, that you wished my wife had married you?"

"I was not speaking to you, Mr. Tremayne," said Cassillis steadily, "and I have nothing to tell you."

"You were speaking to my wife and I demand to know what you meant."

"You will not know it from me. I should go in if I were you, Iris, and leave me to have it out with Mr. Tremayne now."

But Iris was afraid. She tried to patch it up. "Oh, Geoffrey, do be reasonable——" she began.

"Be silent!" ordered Tremayne sternly. "I will talk to you later. I want to hear what Cassillis has to say now. Go on——"

"Julian, you mustn't!" Iris's voice rang shrill with fear. "You promised me, Julian!"

He caught the hand she threw out to him. "Of course I won't. Don't be silly; go in, there's a dear girl."

Tremayne's voice cut across his. "It is unnecessary to make this fuss, Iris. I understand without being told now. It's a well-rooted lie you have both lived, and I have been the dupe. You married me for

my money, and what I could give you. But I have always known that. And I suppose you thought you could keep Julian on afterwards. I have no doubt, too, he will make an excellent tame cat to some woman. His type are always good lovers, but it will not be to my wife."

Iris's face flamed. "That's not true, it's not true!" she cried, but Cassillis said nothing, for Tremayne was looking at him. "Julian, tell him that's not true?"

"He can't tell me so," from Tremayne.

"I have never dishonoured your wife," said Cassillis in a low tone. "That is true."

"I do not believe you; naturally you would lie." He turned to Iris. "Go in, please. I will come and speak to you presently in your room, but just now I have something to say to Cassillis, which I will say alone."

She looked past him to the boy she had once loved; her eyes met his. She knew she could trust him, but she said imploringly:

"Julian——?"

"Go!" repeated Tremayne. "If there is nothing to hide, why are you afraid of leaving Cassillis with me—do you take me for a fool? Do you hear me? Go!"

She went then without even looking back. It was many months before she saw Cassillis again.

"Go into the library," said Tremayne, and he spoke as if to a man of his own age. They were equals now, rivals for the woman they both loved. He shut the window, and the door, and then came back to where Cassillis was standing.

"Now explain," he said. "Do you imagine yourself in love with my wife?"

"That is a difficult question to answer. I was when I was a boy, but I have not spoken a word of love to her since she married you."

"Some weeks ago, when last you were here, we

spoke, you and I, of a woman. You know what I refer to? Was that woman Iris?"

"Yes. There has never been another in my life. But there is no wrong——"

"I do not believe you. I saw you kissing her hand two nights ago in the garden."

"If you did, you had followed us, and anyway it was only in respect and friendship; I can swear to you——"

"Do not swear, for I should not believe it. I do not expect you have any more idea of truth than honour."

"I am speaking the truth. Since you married Iris I have not dishonoured her, nor said a word of love to her. Before that, is my affair, not yours." Tremayne laughed with a little sneer, and the sound of it set fire to smouldering resentment.

Cassillis lost his head for a moment. "She was not yours then, she was mine," he said. "Anyhow, she was mine first!"

Tremayne grasped at the words. "And that's the secret! What happened before she married me? Come along—let's have it, what did happen?"

"Nothing." He recollected his promise. "I was a boy, and in love with her, that's all."

"You are lying to me, it is not all!" A thousand torturing thoughts surged through Tremayne's mind, and Cassillis could not look up and answer frankly.

"Tell me the truth—tell me the whole truth, or I'll kill you!"

"I have nothing more to tell you." Cassillis went back to the table, and steadied himself against it, his eyes downcast. "I can't tell you any more. You can kill me if you want to, but I won't tell you."

There was no need. Tremayne read the guilt just as plainly as if he had been told it; his face gave him away, and also the very act of not speaking.

"I see," he said. "I thought it was like that."

And you have come here—you have both lied to me, and fooled me—Iris my wife and you, the boy I loved as if you had been my son. You two——”

“Oh, for God’s sake, don’t go on!” Cassillis forgot then. He could not bear any more. “I have loathed myself. I wanted to tell you long ago, but I promised her——”

“How long ago?” asked Tremayne in the same tone. “And why did you not marry her?”

“How could I? I wanted to—but—I wish you wouldn’t ask me. It’s nothing now, it’s all over and done with, and she doesn’t care a bit for me any more. I should have told you long ago.”

“You have not told me yet. I am waiting. I don’t want a dramatic performance—it’s wasted upon me. We are not acting now. As man to man I ask you plainly: What was the relationship between you and Iris before she married me?”

But again Cassillis was silent.

“I am waiting,” said Tremayne.

“I can’t tell you any more. I have given my promise, and I am not going to break it even for you.”

It was the last straw to an exasperated man. In a passion of jealous fury Tremayne caught up a dog-whip lying on a side table and brought it down across the younger man’s shoulders.

“I’ll thrash you within an inch of your life if you don’t tell me!”

Cassillis shuddered under the unexpected blow. “Very well, if you want to,” he answered. “I don’t care——”

* * * * *

“I won’t tell you. You’ll have to kill me, and you won’t know then——”

Tremayne was as white as Cassillis. He flung the dog-whip across the room; he was breathing hard.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said tensely. “I know all I want to. Get up now——”

"Oh God!" said Tremayne, and he got up with a face like a soul in torment.

"I beg your pardon," said Langley, "I had better stop, as we get nothing out of discussing it. But I cannot, priest though I am, let you put all the blame on Cassillis, when I know he meant no wrong."

"I know, and it is I who should beg your pardon for saying what I did," returned Tremayne quietly. "I hope he is well, and getting on all right. Has he plenty of money, do you know? He does not draw on the allowance I made him. It is lying in the bank, and has not been touched since June."

"He seems quite all right, and he writes to me most cheerfully, and seems to be well off. I think this Lady Hammond is very good to him."

"Doubtless she will be now she has got him," said Tremayne sadly. "But what a waste!"

He went out on the balcony, leaving Langley sitting by the fire alone. And the priest knew, perhaps better than any one, what the disappointment must have been to him.

* * * * *

In the morning Iris repented her decision to go with Mrs. Humphreys. She tried to persuade Tremayne again to let her stay at home with him, but he, filled with fresh bitterness, would not hear of it.

"If you don't go to Madeira, you will have to go to Trelawn," he said. "You can't stay in town all the winter; it's bad for you, and I shall be busy."

Iris understood, and flushed at his tone. "In fact, you want to get rid of me."

"I do not put it like that. I think for a time it would be better if you went away, and why not?"

"Last winter——" she began, but he cut her short.

"Oh, please do not let us have any reminiscences; they are only painful and do no good. I am suggesting it for both our sakes. Go to Trelawn if you prefer, but I shall not go with you, neither shall I keep you here with me. Be sensible, Iris. We have

made a failure of our marriage, but we are still tied together. The situation will adjust itself presently, and we shall come to take the changed conditions naturally. I daresay, if you would be honest, you are glad of them, but it is different for me, and for my part, for this winter at least, I wish you to go away, and prefer to be without you."

"You are very unkind," murmured Iris, "and very unjust."

"Not at all," he answered calmly. "I am sensible, and you are not. You only want to please yourself and your whims, and I am not going to do that any more. Please yourself, therefore, what you do, but whether you go or stay, understand I will not live under the same roof as you this winter."

He went out of the room and left her there. Iris wondered in a heartsick way where Cassillis was.

But she went to Madeira.

CHAPTER XXV

TREMAYNE was in Manchester attending the last of four annual concerts given during the winter months.

He ought, however, to have returned to town on the morning following the concert, and met his wife at Tilbury docks that evening. But, intentionally, he remained there late to avoid meeting her.

He had arranged the next few months excellently. Trelawn was to be opened again at Easter, and they, together with Mrs. Humphreys, were to go down there for the summer; regular batches of visitors would come down also, and they would never be alone.

All this, of course, Iris did not know when she was sailing unsuspectingly up the English Channel, and it was part of Tremayne's plan that she should not know; but meanwhile, there was the meeting to be got through; and after four months' absence, Tremayne was secretly rather nervous of it, and anxious to avoid it. It would certainly be easier in the Cimric, a public place, than on board ship, where all sorts of things were looked for; and he was taking no risks.

The winter had been bearable, for his fury had helped to keep him hard, and unforgiving; also he had been fully occupied with his music, and philanthropic schemes in connection with Langley's and other churches in town. But he looked for no more artists, and genius might remain in obscurity for ever, as far as he was concerned. Tremayne would never train another man. Cassillis would be his last.

He had arrived at the Midland Hotel, only just in

time to dress and dine before the concert commenced at the early north country hour of 7.30. And he did not get back until after eleven, having many people to see. Then he went up to his sitting-room, had supper there, and straightway retired.

In the morning, however, purposely putting in time, he walked down Peter Street, and passing the Theatre Royal, saw placarded up outside :—

“THE CALVEY LIGHT OPERA COMPANY.”

THIS NIGHT, TUESDAY, AND ALL THE WEEK,

“FANCY FAIR”

A musical comedy in four acts, straight from the Star Theatre, London, with all scenery, music and effects.

Mdlle. SYLVIA DENISE as *Chesnut*.

Mr. JULIAN CASSILLIS as *Peter*.

Above was a photograph of the lady; she was pretty, he noticed, and young. Below was one of Cassillis in ordinary evening dress. From the pavement where he stood, Tremayne scarcely recognized him. Either he had changed, or the photograph lied.

He went back to the hotel, and gave orders for his room to be kept. It only meant that he would join Iris the next day instead of that evening, and it would cost (it was with a twisted smile he thought it out) just about the same to his heart and pride to meet the boy as the girl! He had a curiosity, too, to see what the stage had made of Cassillis, and to look at him unseen, now that he knew everything and was sane and cold.

So that evening found him in a box at the theatre, where, half hidden behind the curtains, he could level his opera glasses on the stage, and watch as well as listen. And as he listened, so the remembrance came poignantly back to him of the tiny room in the Coastcliff Hotel, with the cottage piano, and the fair boy in the rough clothes, singing.

What a fall! As well could he have pictured an angel fallen from heaven! All the hopes and dreams, the ambitions and enthusiasms of this young life had been to sing in opera—in concert—in oratorio, and now it had come to this! He was playing in musical comedy. It was very pretty, of course, with plenty of pretty girls and young men, a background of imitation roses, and a great deal of limelight.

Tremayne sat through it, but Cassillis never saw him. He seemed happy enough as he smiled and sang to the girl who was acting with him, and full of youth and life, as if trouble had never touched him.

When he reached the hotel again, he asked the hall-porter if Mr. Cassillis were staying there, and received an affirmative reply, but with it the information that the actor had already come in and gone to his room.

In the morning he sent up his card to the number given, but a message came back that he was not up yet. He expected that, but was not to be outdone. He waited in the entrance hall where he reckoned that Cassillis would come for his letters, and would have to pass to go out into the street.

He did not know it, but Cassillis had seen him the previous day, and had tried to avoid a meeting. He thought Tremayne would be certain to return to London by an early morning train, and after his message, he walked boldly downstairs, and straight into him.

"Good morning, Julian," said Tremayne. "I saw you were playing here; in fact, I was at the theatre last night and heard you."

He held out his hand, but Cassillis did not see it. He stood still and said: "Good morning," stiffly, adding, "yes, I expect you saw my name on the placards. I saw the announcement of your concert and thought you might be here."

"I am glad the opportunity occurred. Will you

come up to my sitting-room? I should like a talk with you."

"I don't think there is anything to say, but I will come if you wish, of course."

He did not look at Tremayne, and seemed rather indifferent, which hurt the elder man a little. He would have been better pleased if he had appeared agitated. Also (Tremayne was but human), it must be confessed that he would have had far more satisfaction if things had been otherwise; if he had gone to see Cassillis in some dreary rooms, such as he had often visited in search of genius; or if he had looked ill, tired, down-at-heel, or shabby, but there was nothing of that sort.

The hotel was one of the best, and Cassillis looked very well. He was older, his face was lined and his eyes were tired, but he looked prosperous, and was well and quietly dressed.

They went up in the lift, and Tremayne took him into his sitting-room, a pretty room with flowers and a bright fire.

"I have often wished to have a talk with you," he began; "but I think you have been on tour all the winter. Langley told me what you were doing."

"Yes," answered Cassillis; "I have been touring since September. I believe I am quite a success, too, though, of course, I have really only just started. I hope, however, to pay you back the money you spent upon me very soon."

"I don't want the money." Tremayne's voice was rough, for that hurt. "Keep what you make. You have not touched the money in the bank since June."

"No, I told you I should not."

"Then how did you manage until you made good?"

"I borrowed, and Calvey was awfully decent. He advanced me my screw. I have friends."

"Meaning Lady Hammond; I suppose she lent you money?"

"Yes, but I have paid her back now."

"And you like acting and touring? Don't you find the work hard?"

"Yes, but I like it. They star me, and I am getting on."

They did not sit down. Neither of them thought of it, but half nervously Tremayne offered Cassillis a cigarette and lit one for himself.

"I have a matinee at two, and I must not smoke or I shall not be able to sing," said Cassillis; and then: "What did you want to say to me? You did not bring me up here to ask me about my work?"

That was true, but now that they were there Tremayne had nothing he could say. Of what use was it to bring up the old story again? He had wanted to see the boy, but there was no explanation he cared to give.

"No," he said; "I wanted to see you and tell you how sorry I am for the scene we had at Trelawn, and the hasty way I acted towards you. I regret my temper probably far more than you. Since then, the whole story has come to my knowledge, and I know you did not intend the wrong I imputed to you. I am glad to have an opportunity of telling you so. Will you lunch with me?"

Cassillis shook his head. "I can't, I have a matinee, and it's no good. The thing is done, and however sorry you are, you wouldn't understand. You couldn't, so why talk about it? I hope Iris is well"—he deliberately called her that, but it made no impression.

"Quite well, I suppose," returned Tremayne. "I have not seen her for four months. She has been abroad all the winter, and arrives in London to-day. There is one thing I should like you to tell me while we are here. Why did you never ask me to allow you to marry Iris, if you wanted to?"

Cassillis smiled a little. "Of what use would it have been? Who am I? I will tell you something

perhaps you do not know, Mr. Tremayne. I heard from Coastcliff a few months ago, and my mother is dead; but she was not my mother, nor was my so-called father any relation to me. I was picked up about twenty-five years ago after the wreck on that coast of a liner bound from Hamburg to New York, and I was tied to a spar. The only identification on me was the name of 'Julian' and some papers proving who my mother was. She was not drowned in that wreck, but had died in India, where I was born, and some one else was taking me to the States. My mother was an actress; her name was Julie Lauresque, but God only knows who my father was! I may find out some day, and it may not be a pleasant surprise. How could I hope to marry a girl like Iris, or any one of your class? It doesn't matter to a woman, but a man ought to have a name. I shall make mine, but I had not done it then, nor did I know how to do it. And Iris would not have waited. Of course you say I ought to have thought of that then, but I didn't, and men like you are not competent to judge such as myself. You are too good, you are superhuman, and—you were in an assured position. You knew Iris would have to marry you, unless she was already married. You thought we were wrong, and I think you called me utterly depraved, but I was not. I wanted to make sure of her, that was all, and to my way of thinking there was far more depravity and wrong in your marriage, for you bought her. What Iris gave me, she gave me willingly, because at that time she loved me, but she had to marry you."

It was true, and Tremayne knew it. He sat still and did not answer, while the furies of jealousy tore again at his soul. This was Cassillis's hour. He had had his, at Trelawn, and he had asked for this, so he bore it with a self-control as supercalm, as he was in the other's opinion superhuman.

"So you won't lunch with me," he said after a

time. "I am sorry. I should like to hear some more about the stage; also about the news you received from Cornwall."

"There were only a few letters sent on to me, and one or two miniatures.. Some day when I have made money, I shall inquire into it all, but just now I have no time and I don't care."

"And you won't come and see me?"

"I would rather not. It wouldn't do."

"You are rather unforgiving. I misunderstood you perhaps, and I was hard. Iris is my wife and I was jealous. I don't mind admitting it now. But we might forget."

"I am sorry, I don't think I could forget. I am grateful to you for all you did, but I would rather go on my own way now."

Tremayne turned to the door.

"Be careful of Lady Hammond, Cassillis," he said.

"I know her, you see, and she is a dangerous friend to any young man like you."

"She has been very kind to me. I could not have done what I have without her."

"I cannot think you like her, nor her type."

"It is very hard to account for these likes and dislikes." For a minute their eyes met—Tremayne's shifted first. "She has had many friends, and is immensely popular," added Cassillis very quietly.

They did not shake hands. Tremayne felt as if an immeasurable barrier had been raised between them, and Cassillis was defending himself on the other side. He let him go, but just for a minute they looked at each other, challenging, appealing—and which was the more sick at heart, it would be hard to tell.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE greeting between Iris and Tremayne after the winter was not cordial.

She had expected him to meet her, had been looking forward to it all the way home, and she was bitterly disappointed and hurt.

He, after his meeting with Cassillis, was depressed and irritable, and neither had anything to say to the other.

Outside it poured with rain, and the March wind howled dismally. It was the beginning of a wet and dreary summer.

They went to Trelawn as arranged, accompanied by the faithful Mrs. Humphreys, and stayed there from Easter to October. They were never without visitors in the house, until Iris came to hate the sight of them, and longed bitterly and hopelessly to have the place again to themselves.

On their honeymoon, while in Italy, they had met another couple also on their honeymoon, and a casual travelling acquaintance had sprung up. Iris had liked this Mrs. Maddison then, enjoyed her rather racy conversation, and profited by the hints that she had given her on dress and appearance. She was anxious to keep up the so-called friendship afterwards, and had, in fact, gone two or three times to see Olive Maddison at her London flat; but after the Maddisons had spent weeks at Trelawn she felt she hated them.

The Maddisons liked Trelawn. They had few friends and spent their winters travelling, but the beautiful

Oxfordshire country made a delightful break to them from their flat, and they were in no haste to leave it once they were there.

And when Langley came, asked by Tremayne, it was not even comfortable, and his presence filled Iris with heartsick memories.

Once she asked him where Cassillis was, and he told her what he had told Tremayne.

"The stage!" exclaimed Iris. "How Geoffrey must hate it. He wouldn't let him go on it, and I know Julian wanted to. Where is he now?"

"Playing at the Star Theatre in London."

"Do you see him, or hear from him?"

"Sometimes. He is very much changed."

Iris nodded. "I wish I could see him again," she said longingly. "I was very fond of Julian, but Geoffrey would never understand, nor would he let us be friends. It is a pity, because you know we could have been real friends, like brother and sister."

"It is a pity," repeated Langley, because he felt the truth of it. "But I am afraid it is too late to clear it up now. Cassillis has gone, and he will not come back to us."

"Does Geoffrey see him, or hear from him, do you know?"

Langley shook his head; he did not know.

So Iris went about with a heartache which daily grew worse, instead of better; and Tremayne, his temper ragged and frayed under the strain, grew colder and sterner than ever before. He wanted to go on being angry and indifferent to his erring wife, as he had been all the winter, and when he could not always manage it, he was downright bad-tempered and difficult.

He kept out of her way, was out for whole days, and disagreeable when he was at home; trying unavailingly to drown his heartsickness and trouble in pleasures which were no pleasures. Iris was not so successful. She did not even try, and her guests,

including Mrs. Humphreys, saw plainly enough that she was not happy. She dressed beautifully, and was a perfect hostess. She was never late, and never apparently tired; she did whatever her guests wished, and joined in everything, but she had not the slightest interest in anything on earth.

The Maddisons came in July, while Langley was still with them. They brightened things up, for Mrs. Maddison was a gay lady, and liked to have a gay time wherever she went. She was much cleverer than Iris; her tongue was sharp, and her eyes and brain sharper, and Iris could not think, now, how she could have liked her in the old days. She was extremely musical, of course, which was the attraction she had for Tremayne. Iris was not musical. Not because she did not love it, but because there had never been the money to indulge in those tastes when she was a girl at Stapleton Court, and since her marriage she had felt too old to make a start, knowing that she had little talent in that direction.

It was therefore a miserable week as far as she was concerned. Mrs. Humphreys was there, as well as a man whom the Maddisons had brought with them, and Langley, and a fellow curate from St. Dominic's Church; but of course the house-parties at Trelawn were not lively affairs. Mrs. Maddison had all she wanted; in three words—golf, music, and Tremayne. Langley and the other men golfed and played bridge; there was good fishing, and beautiful country for motoring, but it was all equally uninteresting to Iris.

It was during this week that Mrs. Maddison suggested Algeria for the winter.

They were sitting on the terrace after dinner one evening and Mrs. Humphreys was telling them about her plans to spend the winter in Southern Spain.

"Iris will come with me," she was saying. "We shall go to Ronda, and sit in the sun. It will be warm

there, and lazy. No one does any work, and we live on olives and brown bread."

"We are going to Algeria," returned Mrs. Maddison. "I want to go into the desert. Why don't you come with us?"

There was no answer, and she turned to Tremayne. "Come to Algeria, Mr. Tremayne," and she smiled at him. "Why not? Let us go into the desert and look for the *rose de sable*; it will be warm there, and who knows what might not happen?"

He smiled back at her, and made a host of excuses which she laughed at, until he had to admit that he would like it very much.

"But he is above temptation, so you might as well save your voice," said Iris disagreeably. "He wouldn't go, just because I should love it."

She repeated the latter remark to Mrs. Humphreys late in the evening, as they stood in the hall by the fire.

"I wish he'd take me, but he won't. He never does anything I want, or ask, now."

Tremayne overheard her as he passed. "You change your mind so often that one does not know what you do want," he retorted. "I certainly do not give in to your every whim and fancy, if that is what you mean. Nor am I any woman's slave."

It was just then that Mrs. Maddison's voice rang out across the hall:

"Come and try this duet, Mr. Tremayne, will you?"

"A slave to music," said Iris rather sadly. "It is all you care about in the world now, I believe."

"It is all you have left me to care about," he answered bitterly.

* * * * *

Once during the time they were at Trelawn, Mrs. Maddison asked Tremayne if he knew Lady Hammond. She met her at a dinner it appeared, and mentioned that she was coming down to Trelawn.

"She said she knew you."

"Used to know me," corrected Tremayne politely. "The acquaintance ceased some time ago. Why?"

"She said she had not met your wife and would like to do so, so I thought I would ask Iris to meet her at lunch one day when we are all back in town. That is, of course, if you do not object."

"I do object most strongly." Tremayne frowned. "I do not care for Lady Hammond nor her set, and I should prefer you not to introduce her to my wife."

Mrs. Maddison looked at him, and he looked back for quite a few moments.

"I am sorry. I did not know you felt it like that," she said sweetly. "And you really would rather she did not meet Iris?"

"Stronger than that, my dear lady—I decline to allow my wife to meet Lady Hammond," smiled Tremayne.

Iris did not care, and had no interest in the matter, but afterwards out of perversity she asked him why not.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Go, if you particularly want to, I don't care," he said harshly. "And you will probably meet Julian Cassillis there. I think just at present she is keeping him, and he is her tame cat——"

He knew that would hurt, and was glad when he saw, by the rush of colour to her face, that the shot had struck home. "So if your affections are still engaged in that direction," he added, "I should advise you not to go."

* * * * *

But the summer ended at last.

And this time Iris did not protest when the time came for her to go with Mrs. Humphreys to the South.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON a warm sunny afternoon they steamed into the Bay of Algiers, and cast anchor.

Iris's first view of the town was disappointing, for Algiers does not look its best from the sea. The new town had the appearance of any other French port, with its Colonnade along the front, its tall grey and white houses, and its cathedral and churches. The great Mosque stood up with its shining white dome, like a guardian angel, but the old town looked a mixed-up heap of white, flat-roofed buildings without spaces between, and behind there was a ridge of hills which cut off the view of the country beyond.

More disappointing still was the landing, for the Algerian French are not prepossessing, and the dirty crowd and dirty quay disgusted Iris beyond belief.

When at length they left the quay she was silent, and only remarked as they drove through the new town that they might as well be in Paris. It was getting dark now, but still light enough to see that they were winding uphill, and that the houses were getting fewer and the road was widening. Presently they came to a great bank of trees, and a park with an avenue of aloes, and great gates where an Arab sentry stood on guard.

"The Governor's house, I think," said Tremayne.

Now there was nothing but trees on either side, and a few white villas far back from the road, covered with vivid bougainvillea, the hedges dropping with plumbago and hibiscus, whose vivid scarlet petals

littered the path beneath. There were no lamps, and far beneath them they could see the town, and the lights springing into being.

After a long time, for the hill was steep and progress slow, they turned in at an old stone gateway, and drove through a wonderful semi-tropical garden to a low Moorish-looking building which blazed with light, stretching right and left in picturesque and artistic curves and corners.

"Here we are," said Tremayne. "I remember the hotel now, though it is years since I was here."

Iris laughed. "How perfectly sweet!" she cried.

She said it again, but to herself, as they went inside and she looked round at the quaint hall with its beautiful Moorish carving, its coloured mosaics and tiles, and its curious little arched doorways and narrow passages, each one of which led by a sudden turn into a wide space which was the reading-room, or lounge, or into a little secluded corner, where there was a coffee-stool all ready for coffee, and a carved seat.

They went up to their rooms on the first floor, large modern bedrooms commanding a view over trees and slopes to the Bay, where a few lights already twinkled in the fast gathering darkness.

There was a wide balcony outside the long windows, and Iris went there. "Isn't it lovely!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Geoffrey, I am glad we came!" But Tremayne was not there. With a quick frown she remembered he never was, unless she sent for him—in fact, he would probably scarcely use the balcony because their rooms shared it!

She re-entered the room and watched Harrod, her maid, unpacking. Then she bathed, and dressed for dinner, choosing a white lace gown with a turquoise blue sash, and a necklace of turquoises.

The Maddisons were staying at an hotel not far away. She expected they would walk round after

dinner, and Iris always endeavoured to look her best when Mrs. Maddison was present.

Tremayne had gone down and was waiting for her in the hall below, looking at some of the mosaics. She was about to turn the last corner of the winding staircase when she saw a man go across to him.

"Geoffrey Tremayne of Trelawn!" he exclaimed with a little laugh, and from where she stood Iris could hear every word he said. "It must be ten years since I saw you last."

Tremayne swung round, puzzled a second. "I have not forgotten you, nor your mother, nor your beautiful home," continued the man.

"Rutherford, of course!" exclaimed Tremayne. "I am sorry I did not remember you for a minute, but it is nearly twenty years since you first came to Trelawn."

They shook hands and seemed pleased to see each other, and talked of what had happened, how they both came to be there, and so on, while Iris, feeling rather an eavesdropper, waited on the seat half-way up the staircase.

And then, "Are you married, Mr. Tremayne?" asked the stranger. "I have sometimes wondered if you were. I remember Trelawn, and picture yourself and your children there."

A cloud passed swiftly over Tremayne's face. "Yes, I am married," he replied quietly, and it seemed to Iris, an unseen witness, bitterly. "But there are no children in Trelawn; I wish there were."

The stranger smiled a little. "Did you marry Molly after all, then? I have heard nothing of her for years. How pretty she was, with her yellow hair. Is she still pretty? But of course she cannot be very young now; is she really with you?"

"You are making a mistake," interrupted Tremayne hastily. "I did not marry Molly Fane; all that is twelve years ago. My wife is here. I will

introduce you"; and he turned to look for Iris, who, at his first movement in her direction, had come down the remaining stairs.

She was rather pleased at another man's appearance, and hoped he would prove interesting, and join their party, for Tremayne had been somewhat trying this week since Mrs. Humphreys had left them, and they had come on to Algiers from Southern Spain. And she was not at all pleased at the thought of the Maddisons being with them. Only the desire to see Algeria had made her consent to this tour with them.

The strange man looked pleasant and humorous. He shook hands with her, and his eyes were full of admiration for her pretty self. He was not young, but he was younger than Tremayne, and still, as he frankly told them, a bachelor.

"And how long have you been a bride?" he asked Iris presently.

She flushed a little. "Not a bride now," she said; and Tremayne added—

"We have been married nearly three years, and finished our honeymoon a long time ago."

"If we ever had one," said Iris—and though she laughed for a moment, her lip quivered. Then she plunged into a number of questions about Algeria, since it appeared that the new man had been out all the winter, and knew the country well.

Tremayne let her talk, though he did not look too pleased at her interest and animation, and when she suggested as they went in to dinner that Dr. Rutherford should come and sit at their table, he was not exactly cordial over it. But he could hardly refuse, especially when the invitation was quite eagerly accepted, and so the three of them sat down together, and it was a much cheerier meal than those they usually ate in chill silence.

Afterwards, as they were drinking coffee in one of those little corners of the hall for which the hotel is famous, the Maddisons came in. They had, as usual,

a man with them; they called him "Jimmy," but he was introduced by the name of Hill.

Tremayne got up and shook hands with Mrs. Maddison with evident pleasure. Then he, too, smiled and grew animated, and Iris watched them, and hated the other woman.

* * * * *

Rutherford said he would go back to Biskra with them when they went next week. He had been there before, but he was ready to see it again and show it to Iris, to whom he had, quite obviously, taken a fancy. He had no friends in Algiers, and need not return yet to England, so he told them, for a few weeks.

So it was that in the morning Iris wakened with a new and pleasurable sensation. She recollected that she was in Algiers at last, and something very nice had happened. She had met a new man who wanted to show her the desert, and be friends, and of whom—which was the extraordinary thing—Tremayne actually approved.

That evening they dined with the Maddisons at their hotel. Much to Tremayne's surprise, Mrs. Maddison asked Rutherford to come too, and he accepted. Not only that, but he made a point of sitting next to Iris when they were at dinner, and leaving the irate husband entirely out of the reckoning, and to entertain his hostess.

It was of course done without a thought. He could see with his trained professional brain that all was not well with this couple, that they hardly ever addressed each other, and were never left alone; he could see that, pretty though she was, Iris was not happy nor looked it, and that Tremayne was a cold, callous, stern husband for such a sweet little wife. So he set himself to work to keep her amused, and he succeeded very well.

"They are always like that, you know," remarked Olive Maddison to him *sotto voce* in an odd moment

after dinner. "They hate the sight of each other; isn't it funny?"

"Or perhaps they do not choose to show their affairs, and dissect their feelings, for the benefit of the world at large and yourself," he retorted; and though she laughed, she took the rebuke and left him severely alone when they all went out on to the terrace to have coffee.

Iris was nearly happy as she sat and chattered to her new friend.

"Tell me about Geoffrey when you knew him," she begged. "Was his mother as perfect as he is?"

"Perfect?" He seemed amused. "Is your husband perfect, then?"

"He poses as being so, at least to me, and he censures any imperfections quickly enough in other people. He is really too good," and she sighed a little, while he looked keenly at her.

"Then who was Molly?" she asked next. "You thought Geoffrey had married her, didn't you? I heard you ask him last night about it. Why? Was he in love with her? I didn't know he was ever in love with any girl, especially a pretty one, and I can't imagine it. He is so austere."

Rutherford smiled. "Molly was a little girl we used to know when we were two young men. She was a cousin of mine, and that is all I can tell you. She was an actress, but whether your husband was ever, as you put it, 'in love with her,' I cannot say. He never confided in me, and it is all so many years ago that I expect he has forgotten all about it by now."

"But—an actress, on the stage!" Iris echoed in real astonishment. "Oh, but that is too funny for words. Geoffrey hates the stage and everything to do with it."

"Men change," said Rutherford quietly. "And your husband was quite young at that time. When first I knew him he was only in the twenties. She was

young, too, and I daresay he has not kept up the acquaintance if, as you say, he hates the stage."

"What was her name?"

"Molly Fane. Do you know it?"

"No, I never heard of it. I don't know anything at all about the stage"; but she drew her brows together, thinking hard, for it seemed to her that there was something familiar about the name which she could not trace.

Tremayne was sitting with Mrs. Maddison. They were quite close together, and Iris could see them. Once she put her hand on his arm to emphasize some point of her conversation, and Iris wondered if he liked it as, long ago, he used to like her to be close to him. They had been strangers for such a long time now that she had begun to believe that he had grown cold and did not care for such demonstrations.

"Was she like Mrs. Maddison?" she asked idly but thoughtfully, wishing, when she had done so, that she had not spoken lest Rutherford should think her jealous.

"Well, yes, there is a resemblance," he answered frankly, "but that's all."

They spent the rest of the evening together; but she and Olive Maddison were alone for a few minutes when Iris went to put on her coat to return to their own hotel.

"Do you like that man?" asked the elder woman with unveiled curiosity. "I mean Dr. Rutherford."

"Very much indeed. Why?" returned Iris.

"I don't like him at all. He is like a seer, and he knows far too much. He will read you like an open book."

Iris smiled at that; she had, as a matter of fact, expected it. "I think he is delightful," she said lightly. "And it's a good thing I do, for it gives me some one to talk to. You and my husband get along splendidly, and it's a change to find any one who will put up with my poor society."

Mrs. Maddison smiled at herself in the mirror. "Surely you are not jealous of me, are you?" she questioned playfully. "You don't want your husband yourself, and why should I not enjoy him?"

Iris flushed and looked daggers at her one-time friend. "No, I am not jealous," she retorted. "There is nothing to be jealous about, but if you are to enjoy my husband's company, there is no reason why I should not appreciate other companionship."

She swept away without waiting for a reply, and that, as far as Iris was concerned, was the end of the friendship. She had not been jealous, nor thought about it, but now that the suggestion was made she knew that she was jealous.

Late that night Tremayne sat talking in their own hotel, and, naturally, the conversation came round to the friends with whom they had dined.

"I do not like your friend, Mrs. Maddison," remarked the doctor. "She is a subtle and a dangerous woman."

Tremayne shrugged his shoulders. Women were never dangerous to his mind. "She is amusing," he answered—and Mrs. Maddison would have lost quite a lot of her conceit if she could have heard him. "She is a good talker and very fond of music, which is why she interests me."

"Ah, yes, your music. I forgot that. She is no friend to your wife, anyway. Mrs. Maddison would be a friend to no other woman."

"One never knows whether women are friends or enemies, they always say the opposite to what they mean."

"Do you admire her?"

"I neither admire her nor otherwise; she is all right, but I am not much of an admirer of women, you know."

"Yet you married a beautiful and charming specimen. What a statement! Your wife, my dear Tremayne, is as fair as the princess of a fairy tale, or

as the Queen in Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King.' "

The simile was unfortunate. Tremayne had not forgotten that in the story Langley had told him this had been Cassillis's name for Iris in their young days. He frowned.

"I am afraid I am not poetical, nor do I admire the lady in question, who, if I remember rightly, was rather immoral."

"And do the morals of Mrs. Maddison appear better to you, I wonder?" Rutherford was amused. "I should imagine, if I am anything of a judge, they are *non est* in her case. She reminds me of my cousin Molly, whom we knew so well. Is that, I wonder, wherein lies her attraction for you?"

"She has no attraction for me," snapped Tremayne, "and I have forgotten all that nonsense about your cousin long ago. Molly went on the stage, as you know, and married. She is absolutely no good, and I would prefer you did not talk about her to my wife. Mrs. Maddison, by the way, knows her also; she wished to introduce Iris to her, but I would not allow it."

"That was a foolish thing to do," said Rutherford—but he said it to himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"I AM not going to dine with the Maddisons this evening," said Iris, one day after they had been about a week in Algiers. "We have had them with us almost every evening since we came, and I am absolutely sick of them."

"Nonsense," returned Tremayne. "What do you want to do—dine with me alone, or with Rutherford? Three is no company, as well you know, and I prefer to be six."

"Very well, then, you can go to the Continental. I shall stay at our hotel. Dr. Rutherford said he would take me driving, and if I go, it means coming back early."

She did not particularly want to go out with Rutherford, but she was tired of Mrs. Maddison and the profound contempt that she showed for her and her inability to keep her husband interested and in a good temper.

Mrs. Maddison was enjoying herself, because she had now got Tremayne to herself and his wife otherwise engaged. She could afford to be nice to Rutherford, however much she disliked him, and she lost no opportunity of letting Tremayne know how she viewed the new-comer and the friendship which had sprung up between him and Iris.

"You can't go out with Rutherford in the evening without me," said Tremayne in an annoyed tone, "and I am not coming, so you will have to go to the Maddisons with me."

But Iris was learning. When they went back to their hotel she went straight to her room and did not go down to luncheon. To Tremayne's inquiry, she answered that she had a bad headache.

"Your wife not well?" asked Rutherford, noticing her absence.

"A little temper in the guise of a headache, I fancy," returned her husband shortly.

Presently he went up to her room. She was sitting on the balcony writing, and as he came out he saw her catch up a letter lying beside her on the chair, and hide it away quickly.

"Quite made up your mind to have a headache, or will you come out?" he asked.

"I have one, and I would rather stay here. I am writing letters."

"There is no mail out for two days, you know. And what about this evening?"

"I have told you. Will you go—whether I do so or not?"

"Of course, if you choose to stay at home alone, I can't help it."

He turned to the door again and then looked back. It was a long letter she was writing, and Iris hated letter-writing. Even Mrs. Humphreys could get barely a few lines from her.

"Are you writing to Mrs. Humphreys?" he asked. "You might tell her from me——"

"No, I am not." She looked up. "I wrote last mail, and she hasn't written to me since I came."

"Then whose is the letter in your bag?" He was suddenly suspicious. "You did get one last mail. I saw the porter give you one."

"Only from a shop in Gibraltar about a dress-robe I had ordered when I was in Algeçiras."

Tremayne's eyes wandered to her chain bag. It lay on the table and there was a letter in it, but through the silver mesh he could not see whose it was.

"Do you, then, carry all your letters about with you?" he asked. "And to whom are you writing when there is no outward mail? You cannot write pages to a shop, and you seem to have been busy."

Iris calmly folded up her leather case and shut the papers out of sight. "That is my concern," she said. "Why should I not write to whom I choose?"

He went out then and left her, and Iris spent the afternoon in her long cane chair till the sun had set. It was cool and still, and when the glare had died away the golden rays of the sunset fell across the bay, rippling the smooth glassy surface into silvery lines, and turning it from green to purple, and from pink to blue, in opalescent glory as the shadows lengthened.

Tremayne looked in again about six. She was still writing. "Don't be so foolish," he said tolerantly. "Get dressed and come along, there is plenty of time, and we will have a drive first."

She shook her head and would not go. "I will not dine with Mrs. Maddison this evening. I don't feel like her, and I know I should be rude to her. I hate her sometimes."

"You hate everything, don't you? Well then, what am I to say—that you are not well?"

"Whatever you like, if you insist upon going. I don't care."

The door shut again, and she finished her letter. Then she let her maid dress her in a pretty white dress and hat, and went downstairs. As she expected, Rutherford was in the hall. He looked surprised, and said that he thought she was not well, having seen Tremayne drive away by himself.

"I am perfectly well," said Iris with a smile, "but I didn't want to go. I am so tired of Mrs. Maddison's voice, and I thought I would much rather stay at home."

Rutherford smiled, and saw no guile. In fact, he was pleased to be of comfort to this pretty little woman. He said :

"What about our drive, then, if you feel well enough? Shall we go now, or would you like an early dinner and a drive afterwards? I think that would be better. I don't expect you had much lunch."

"I did not," returned Iris honestly. "I was too cross. And I think that would be lovely."

She enjoyed the evening. Rutherford went out of his way to amuse her and keep her happy, and she told him with a pathetic humour about Mrs. Maddison, and how much she had come to dislike her.

"I am not jealous," she said, belying her own words every moment, "but I can't help feeling how much more she interests him than I do. I always feel so young and immature beside her; she has had so much more experience than I, and is so talented. She seems to know, and has heard, every opera that ever was written or played, and can hum all the 'motifs,' the overtures, and all the bits of sonatas and symphonies that Geoffrey loves. She can play so awfully well too, so soulfully, he says, and I can't do anything."

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," quoted Rutherford. "Why do you want to 'do' things?" He did not understand.

Tremayne came back in a bad temper. He had spent an evening which ought to have been pleasant, considering the trouble that his hostess had taken to entertain him, but which he had literally hated, and which even she could see was not to his liking.

Olive Maddison was almost out of temper herself before the evening was over, because he was so cold and stiff with her, and would talk about nothing but music. She wanted to talk about himself and about

his "silly little wife," and that was a subject which he point-blank refused to discuss.

"I believe you are fuming to get back to her," she remarked, when for the twentieth time he had said he must go. "What do you think will have happened to her—will she have gone out with Dr. Rutherford? I expect so."

"I don't think so. But I must look after her; she is very young."

"Of course; but is this terrible anxiety necessary? Dr. Rutherford might be on the point of eloping with her every time he looks at her from the way you watch them."

"Rutherford is an excellent fellow,"—irritably—"there is no one I would rather trust. But Iris is foolish——"

"Yes, absurdly young and foolish to be your wife," purred that lady. "But I understand her father was your friend, and I suppose you promised him to look after her, like the hero of a novel. That's what always happens in novels, isn't it? And the hero usually repents too late, and wishes he had not been so chivalrous! Did you?"

Her impudence was amazing, and Tremayne got up angrily.

"No," he said stiffly. "That was not the case at all, and you are quite mistaken."

She was penitent at once, and begged his forgiveness sweetly, but it did not soothe his temper, and he would not sit down again.

He went back to the hotel, and found Iris was out with Rutherford, although it was after ten o'clock. He waited in the lounge for them to come in.

When he heard the car drive up, he went out to meet her.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"I have been curing your wife's headache," Rutherford answered. "She is better now," he added,

smiling at Iris who was looking rather frightened, for she had not expected Tremayne to be back first.

"So it seems," he returned dryly. "But if you were well enough to go for a drive you were well enough to go out to dinner with me. Are you going up to your room?"

He thanked Rutherford for his "kindness" with a little irony, and followed Iris upstairs. He knocked on her door, and went in.

One glance at his dark face and the maid laid down the hairbrush she had just picked up, and beat a hasty retreat.

"Had you arranged to dine and drive with Rutherford?" demanded Tremayne.

Iris looked surprised. "No, I told you he was going to take me out, and we always dine together."

"You told me you had a headache. Was that only pretence to avoid coming to the Continental with me?"

"I had a headache and I did not want to come, but I didn't see why I should spend the evening up here, and when I went down Dr. Rutherford was there and asked if we could have our drive, that's all."

"Is it? Well, next time you tell me you are ill and unable to come out with me, you will please stay in your room, and not get up as soon as I have gone, and go out with another man. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," she looked at him. "But as long as you go where you like and do what you like, why should not I do the same? Why should I be obliged to dine with people whether I like them or not, if I do not wish to? I am not your slave."

"Mrs. Maddison——"

"Oh, I am sick of her!" Iris flung down her bag in sudden temper. "She runs after you, and she doesn't want me there. She even had the impudence to tell me the other day that I was jealous!"

Tremayne's face changed. "Are you out of your senses when you say such a thing? Don't talk nonsense, and whether you are sick of her or not, I will not allow you to talk like this about another woman and myself. Neither will I allow you out like this at night with any man, even Rutherford. You will kindly behave yourself while you are here."

Iris stared at him, much too interested in his unreasonable anger to answer. It was many months since she had seen him so angry, and just for a moment, as she watched him, a thought crossed her mind. She wondered what he would do if suddenly she went to him, put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and begged him for the love and tenderness he had once lavished upon her. She laughed to herself at the bare idea—he would probably tell her not to be a hysterical fool but to go to bed!

He turned to the door, and then, as he had done that afternoon, he came back.

"Are you writing to Julian Cassillis?" he asked quietly.

She started at that. "Of course not. How could I be? I do not know where he is."

"You know he is on the stage, and the theatre would find him, or the name of his company. Then to whom were you writing this afternoon?"

"I was not writing to Julian. The rest does not matter."

"And whose letter is that I can see in your bag?"

She threw a glance at it, and, as before, seized hold of it at once, but she did not answer.

"Are you speaking the truth?" he asked. "You had better."

Iris laughed outright then. "I have nothing to tell you lies about any more," she answered. "If you doubt what I say, you can write and ask Julian himself. But my letters are my own, and I shall not

tell you either whose letter I have here, or to whom I was writing. Good night.”

Tremayne stood and looked at her, frowning heavily, then he gave her a curt good night and went away.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT was not a comfortable journey from Algiers to Biskra on a single line through the mountains. The train shook and jolted all night, and when Tremayne's servant—the indispensable March—came to tell them in the early morning that "coffee" was served in the other compartment, Iris and Mrs. Maddison were just ready to quarrel.

Olive had jeered at Iris in Algiers for travelling with a maid, and, resenting it, Iris had asked if she might not leave her there while they went up to Biskra.

This morning she brushed out her curly hair and twisted it up carelessly, with the conscious pleasure that she always looked her best; but Mrs. Maddison thought what a tenfold blessing a maid would have been on that occasion.

"Next time I do a journey like this," she observed as they drank their coffee, "I shall buy a wig first, and pin it on in the morning, so that I don't look a fright."

"If my hair didn't curl naturally, I should curl it myself," remarked Iris rather vindictively. "I should not look a fright."

"Your remark is apt, but scarcely complimentary," retorted the other. "It reminds me of Lady Hammond, too. Like you, she is always boasting of her hair. Do you tint yours?"

"No," shortly.

"She does and she does not mind saying so, either; she was famous for her yellow hair on the stage. Wasn't she, Mr. Tremayne?"

Tremayne stiffened instantly. "Really, I do not know—I know nothing about Lady Hammond."

Mrs. Maddison made a wry face, and then smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry," she apologized, "I thought you did."

"I know the picture postcards," he felt obliged to say to modify his terse remark, "but I do not know the lady herself now."

Just then Rutherford, who had been listening, interrupted by saying: "Is that my cousin, Molly Hammond, you are speaking of? Yes, her hair was lovely when she was young. Is she still pretty?"

Mrs. Maddison fastened on the subject eagerly, declaring it must be the same Molly Hammond, and so on; Tremayne looked at Iris who was listening, too, and he remembered what he had told her in the summer about Cassillis and Lady Hammond. He did not know what else she had overheard, or what the doctor, who was apparently bound to put his foot in it, had told her.

He got up, remarking upon the view, and called Iris to come and look at it. She went rather unwillingly and Rutherford stopped to look after them.

"That is because we spoke of Lady Hammond," said Olive with a smile. "He hates her very name, and won't let his wife meet her. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"There is reason in everything," replied the doctor.

* * * * *

It was afternoon when they reached Biskra, and a haze lay over the little white French village with its few hotels, its church, and prefecture. It was very still, and the yellow sunlight fell on the tunnel of mimosa-trees like rays from heaven. It gilded the cross on the spire of the little church, and it wove a halo round the head of Cardinal Lavigerie standing like a sentinel looking down the long white road to Timbuctoo.

It was the Gate of the Desert, and beyond, on the dim horizon, were the date palms of old Biskra, the cluster of Arab huts, and beyond again the stretches of the Col de Sfa and the ridge of blue hills.

They drove in silence through the village. The season was getting on, if Biskra ever has a season, and there were few people about except the French in the streets, and the natives. There was a sprinkling of soldiers of the Foreign Legion, and a few picturesque Arabs wearing coloured slippers and coloured bands round their turbans. They were walking up and down, or sitting beneath the mimosa-trees. A few Soudanese negroes, Arabs, and half-castes were in front of their open shops and cried their wares, and at one street corner an Arab *raconteur* was telling his endless stories in a low singsong voice, to a rapt and silent circle.

The Royal Hotel stood alone, beyond the other buildings on the road to the desert, and was somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the village. It was rather cold inside, and very empty, and Iris was frankly disappointed with it.

Rutherford knew Biskra well, as he had stayed for some weeks on his previous visit, and he was therefore at Iris's disposal to take her wherever she wished to go.

Tremayne longed to object, but he was too proud to make any trouble now that Mrs. Maddison had told him to his face that he was jealous. So he merely fumed, which was more annoying than if he had said anything outright, for if he had given a hint to the doctor, the latter would probably have said genially "Come along with us," and been glad to have him—for Rutherford's only aim in taking Iris about was to give her pleasure, and to ward off Mrs. Maddison's venomous remarks by taking her away from them.

But Tremayne was too jealous to be nice, and when, on the first morning, he suggested that he should get

a guide, and that he and Iris should go out together, Iris answered: "Oh, Dr. Rutherford is going to take me, and we are going to the Count's garden, and to the native market." Whereupon Tremayne, in a sudden temper, went out of the room, and a few minutes later she saw him going off with the Maddisons.

She put on a shady hat and went down to join the doctor and his guide, a handsome Arab youth who spoke perfect French, smoked endless cigarettes, and was dressed all in white with the exception of yellow slippers, yellow braid on his jacket, and a yellow band on his turban. He smiled at Iris, showing his perfect teeth, and told her his name was "El barbi."

They spent the morning in the native market, among all colours and races of people. Iris bought some perfumes. One was called Lotus Flower, and the other Perfume of Paradise, and they were very strong and exotic, and seemed to go to her head like wine.

But it was all so noisy that after a time they left, and walked on to the old village where they talked to funny old people, and Iris went up on to the roofs of the houses to watch the women weaving.

It was lunch time when they reached the hotel again, and the rest of the party had gone into the *salle à manger*.

Olive Maddison was in a spiteful mood, and laughed as Iris came in with a little suggestive word which Tremayne could not fail to hear.

He asked her afterwards if she were going out with Rutherford again.

"Yes," said Iris. "He said he would take me to the famous garden."

"You would rather he took you than I?"

She hesitated. "Oh, please yourself, of course," he said, and added, with the slight sneer she hated, "If you prefer Rutherford——"

"I should not prefer him if you would come in a good temper," she answered pathetically. "But you

are always so cross. Nobody can keep you in a good temper but Mrs. Maddison."

Tremayne glowered at her. "Very well then, go with Rutherford," he threw at her. "You change your mind often enough, and Cassillis is quite out of the running now!"

He knew he was a brute to taunt her with Cassillis's name, but he was of too jealous a nature to bear any man as friend to Iris. But she put it down to a plain desire to hurt and punish her.

She did not therefore give him any satisfaction by answering, only when, as she made a movement to go, he repeated, "So you don't want me to come?" she answered wearily:

"No. In your present mood I do not. I should once have loved you to come and see everything with me, and you would have enjoyed it, but now you would not. I want to be happy, but you won't let me. You will insist upon quarrelling with me and are so unkind. I'd rather go with Dr. Rutherford," and she went away and left him there.

They went down the street, round to the left of the river-bed and the stony sand beyond, and came to the wonderful garden made famous for ever by "The Garden of Allah."

To Iris's amazement, the little wooden door opened just as it did in the book, and a beautiful young Arab, with a cigarette in his mouth, bade them enter. He recognized Rutherford who had been there so often before, and smiled at them, speaking to them in his beautiful pure French. Iris could not understand, and they went on alone down the mystic green avenues.

"We will go and sit by the wall presently," said Rutherford, "and look over the desert. The illimitable space rests you. Do you remember I told you in Algiers that you would all of you find your souls in the desert? When you find yours you should be very happy, too, but it does not bring happiness to

every one. Some it even kills, because if they are hiding the truth the exposure is too much."

"I am hiding nothing," she smiled faintly. "I think Geoffrey knows and believes the very worst of me; that's just it."

"I wonder if that is quite true?"

They walked slowly through the wonderful grounds, still as a desert island in the golden afternoon light. They looked at the *jumoir*, the *salle à manger*, each a separate building of pure white, and the room of the little dog, still sitting in state with its blue china tail curled round it, and the setting of the Louis XV salon with its crimson and gilt.

After a long time, towards sunset, they went to the wall where they looked out over the river-bed to the illimitable spaces of the Sahara. A few horsemen, a string of camels wending their way South with laden packs, and nothing but sand reaching as far as sight could travel, merging into the blue of the African sky.

"Oh!" exclaimed Iris passionately. "Isn't it beautiful! I'd like to go out there into the endless silence and never come back."

* * * * *

CHAPTER XXX

FOR a week or so everything went well, and Iris enjoyed herself in Rutherford's company.

Then one day he announced at lunch, when he had read his mail from England, that he would have to leave them the following day. He must sail at the end of a week's time for London, and must first collect his luggage and car from Algiers.

Iris sat and stared at the tablecloth. Now that it was nearly over she realized what a difference Rutherford's acquaintanceship had made to her, and what close companions they had been.

Suddenly she knew how much she would miss him. Without Rutherford Biskra would be unthinkable; it would be as if the lamp had gone out of the desert.

Mrs. Maddison saw her preoccupation, and laughed at her in the amused way she had.

"Oh, cheer up, Iris," she said. "He isn't going to-day, and you may see him again some day when you get back to London. Don't look as if you had lost your only love!"

Rutherford had left the table before she made the remark, but probably she would have said it just the same if he had been there.

It drew no reply from Iris however, who picked up her silver chain bag and without a word left the room.

She walked up to her bedroom, where she laid the bag down, and went slowly out on to the balcony,

sitting down there in her wicker chair. She could see the street, the line of palms down the desert road, and the mass of dark green that marked the Count's garden. She wondered if she would ever go there again. Not with Tremayne, certainly, and yet—— With a swift sigh she thought how different it might have been if she and her husband were as they ought to have been—lovers! How she would have loved to go there with him, to talk to him of the desert, and its silences and mysteries. But it was another man who had shown it to her, and taught her its lesson.

Tremayne came out of his room, adjoining the balcony, and stood and looked at her.

"You have a large heart, haven't you?" he said, half sneeringly. "It's Rutherford just now, and you have not known him a month."

"I feel as if I had known him all my life, and I am sorry he is going," answered Iris quietly. "I shall miss him very much."

"Perhaps it is a good thing he is going, then."

"Why so?"

"Well, you can hardly expect me, even in the circumstances, and our present relations, to put up with too much."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You never did; you never knew anything, did you? Yet you managed to get yourself into a pretty mess for your age. Hasn't that been a lesson to you?"

Iris drew in her breath sharply, and stared at him. "Are you now insinuating that Dr. Rutherford and I are more than friends, as you did about Julian?"

"Well, you were not 'friends,' were you?"

"After I married you we were, and never anything else."

"You can't be friends with a man like Julian after what he was to you. It's impossible, and I am afraid I do not believe in your 'friendships.'"

"You believe in nothing but evil where I am concerned, I know that; and Mrs. Maddison helps you. Still, if it interests you—I do not believe in her friendship with you, either."

Tremayne stared at her in angry amazement. "But Mrs. Maddison is nothing to me. Don't talk nonsense."

"You talk nonsense about Dr. Rutherford and myself."

People did not usually tell Geoffrey Tremayne that he talked nonsense; not even his wife.

"Well, judging by the way you have been out with Rutherford all and every day, to the exclusion of every one else, it does not appear so," he said coldly. "Every one in the hotel is talking about it, while I think I have only been out once with Mrs. Maddison, and that was to the town."

"I don't care. Dr. Rutherford has only been kind to me, and a friend. You won't be friends!"

"No, I won't," he did not hesitate. "I am not a friend, I am your husband, and I don't forget it; but please let this reference to Mrs. Maddison and myself be your last. You have no cause for complaint there, though God knows that I could hardly be blamed for anything of that sort, considering what I have had from you since we were married."

"Nor I either," retorted Iris in a low voice, "for what I have had from you, and when I remember how you have made me pay for my one mistake. Perhaps, at least, Mrs. Maddison will make you human, and help you to understand a woman, for her experiences must have been legion!"

Tremayne went very quiet. "Iris," he said, "you are not to talk like that. I have told you Mrs. Maddison is nothing to me, and I will not have my name coupled with hers. I have some respect for mine and for hers as well, and I will not have you talk idle scandal."

"Oh, very well, I don't care," replied Iris wearily. "I am so tired of quarrelling."

* * * * *

Tremayne went out alone, and came back about tea-time in a worse temper than before.

Mrs. Maddison was sitting alone in the courtyard, which served also as the lounge, and she called to him: "You look murderous! Whatever is the matter? Come and sit down."

He obeyed, and for a while she chatted to him, while they drank tea. She was dressed all in green, but the colour was no greener than her curious green eyes, and she incessantly smoked Eastern cigarettes which had a strange and subtle scent.

They usually annoyed Tremayne very much, but that day he felt her presence even soothing; and, when after tea she suggested they should go up on the Minaret, he actually agreed, though less than an hour before he told Iris that he had never been anywhere but to the shops with the lady.

Mrs. Maddison smiled as they climbed the outlook tower to view the desert. "Very beautiful, isn't it?" she remarked as they stood on the top of the small square tower guarded by the breast-high parapet. "And how much one can see!"

There lay the village below them, golden and grey in the last rays of the sunset, full of life; there was life in the streets, and life above on the flat roofs where the women and children lived.

The sun disappeared, and the pink and gold deepened to mauve and purple. Mrs. Maddison stole a sidelong glance at Tremayne's stern face. "I wonder what you are thinking about," she said. "You don't look happy. Don't you like Biskra?"

Tremayne was looking towards the green patch of the Count's garden, wondering if Iris were there. "No, I don't like it," he answered. "There is some-

thing the matter with it—something sinister in the air. I don't know what it is."

"It's so very calm here, too calm for my liking. I'd rather have Cairo. This place suits dreamers like Dr. Rutherford, but not live men and women, though I don't think there's anything the matter with the air."

"Then it doesn't suit me."

"It's yourself," she smiled at him, "or your wife."

He stiffened at once and did not reply. Mrs. Maddison's eyes travelled across to the patch of green. "I expect she is there in the garden talking poetry with Dr. Rutherford—and you don't like it a bit——"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Maddison, but I will not discuss my wife even with you."

She laughed, a little amused ripple. "That is foolish of you, for women understand women, and perhaps I could help you."

"You would have to be miraculously clever then, and start by taking ten years off my age."

"Why talk as if you were old? How old are you, I wonder?"

"Forty-three, just twenty years older than my wife."

"What is twenty years? And you don't look it. Why, Dr. Rutherford, must be quite as old as you—and yet——"

Tremayne was silent, and after a minute or two she went on in her gentle voice: "I wonder why men like you marry these butterfly women. They so often do—unfortunately."

"Opposites, I suppose."

"You should have married a musician, some one who could sing when you played, or play the violin"—she played the violin. "Your wife does nothing, does she? She does not care about music either. What a pity!"

"My wife married me for my money," said Tre-

mayne harshly. "Why don't you say so? It's obvious enough."

"Yes, of course, but why did you marry her?"

He did not answer, and there was silence while they leaned on the parapet close together, and the desert air and African night crept over the man like an intoxicant, and wooed his senses. He was very human, and the woman was very fair. Also, she was exerting every force of her sex and her own personality to turn him to her. "I married my wife too young," he said, and it was as if the words were forced from him. There was something different in his voice, as if he were ready to give up the fight.

"Yes," she replied again. "But why worry about her? She's perfectly happy with Dr. Rutherford. She is always talking about him, and they are so suited to each other."

He did not answer, and after another minute—it was growing dark—she put her hand on his arm. Olive Maddison had beautiful hands—long, slim, white hands, looking as if they had never done a stroke of work, and not like Iris's which were browner and harder from country life, gardening, and housework. Iris was fair, with the fresh flowerlike beauty of old England, while Mrs. Maddison had the subtle fascination of a clever, intriguing woman.

Tremayne hated her almost, in this hour, because it came forcibly to him that Iris was right. She wanted him, and was playing for him. Uncomfortably he knew, too, from sheer instinct, that in her own way she was in love with him, and it shamed him.

But he hated her chiefly because she tempted him with the human desire to feel a woman in his arms again, and to know that he still had the power to make one care. He had failed so grievously with Iris—so he thought.

"She ought to have married a boy her own age," murmured the soft voice, and Tremayne moved away quickly.

"You need not tell me so, I know it. Had we not better go down? It is almost dark."

She sighed. "If you wish; it's so lovely here. But perhaps I bore you. I don't suppose Iris will be in yet."

"I think we had better go."

The top of the tower held only a narrow space, for the staircase occupied the centre like a thick pillar. There was room only for one to walk at a time, and Tremayne went back to the door to open it.

Olive Maddison followed him, and passed him at the doorway to step into the darkness within. "I don't think you make the best of things," she said, "nor try to be happy."

"Where does happiness lie?" he asked. "I do not find it."

She did not answer, but brushed past him close in the shadows and the languorous dusk, and instinctively he caught and held her. "I could give it to you!" she murmured, and her hands went up with a half movement to put them round his neck.

Tremayne drew back quickly, and let her go. "Will you descend first, Mrs. Maddison, or shall I? Perhaps that would be better, as it is dark," and, without waiting for a reply he stepped inside and started down the stairs.

Yet in spite of his almost rudeness, Mrs. Maddison smiled as she followed him. She had not played all her cards yet, and could afford, like a cat with a mouse, to let him go awhile, to catch him again at her pleasure (so she thought), and next time to hold him.

* * * * *

Instead of her usual chatter, she was silent at dinner that evening, and sat with veiled eyes, like some Eastern woman, draped in a wide scarf of black and gold from shoulder to ankle, with long ear-rings, and beautiful jewels on the white hands Tremayne so hated.

He and Rutherford talked. Iris sat and listened, sad and tired, but Olive Maddison in the courtyard with her menfolk smoked her endless Eastern cigarettes and made her plans.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE following morning Rutherford left Biskra. Tremayne was not sorry, and did not pretend to be. Mrs. Maddison was sorry because his going interrupted her plans, but glad to be rid of a man who knew too much. Iris mourned his loss as a friend.

There was another Englishman in the hotel. Tremayne disliked him intensely and called him a mountebank, although he represented himself to be a retired British Army officer.

He had been in Biskra all the winter, knew it well and was a great rider; and that evening he came into the hotel salon and suggested a night ride into the desert. It was moonlight just then so the roads would be plain, and he and his guide thought it might interest the ladies.

Mrs. Maddison accepted the suggestion enthusiastically; she was bored with Biskra, always bored with her husband, and she only stayed because Tremayne was there. This at least would prove a diversion, and perhaps more.

Iris shook her head when the plan was mentioned to her. She did not care about any of the men nor want to go out at night. "Besides, my husband would not dream of letting me go," she said.

She was right, for when approached on the subject Tremayne at once said: "Certainly not. I never heard of such nonsense. I am not going for any night rides to native villages; it would be most unsafe. These tribes do not care any too much for strangers, though they pretend to be so friendly, and I do not

trust them, especially with ladies such as you and Mrs. Maddison."

"But if you came too," said Iris, more for the sake of arguing than because she wanted to go.

"But I am not going," he replied shortly. "I neither like the night air of the desert, nor the night wanderers. If the Maddisons go, you are not to."

It was his tone that made Iris feel suddenly perverse. "I don't see why I should not go. I am neither a child nor a slave, so why should I not please myself?"

"I forbid you to go!" he said sternly. "It is an unthinkable thing and I will have nothing to do with it. Tell Mrs. Maddison, or I will, and say no more about it."

"You had better tell her yourself then," returned Iris sweetly, as she went out of the room. "She is sure to give it up if you ask her," and she was fully convinced in her own mind that he had no real objection, and merely wished to be disagreeable.

So she said nothing, and in the morning, the ride having been arranged for that evening by the Maddisons, Mrs. Maddison came knocking at Iris's door, almost before she had finished dressing.

"Good morning," observed that lady, lowering herself into the rocking-chair which was the feature of every room, and taking out her cigarettes.

"Good morning," answered Iris, very straight and unsmiling, "Did you want me?"

"My dear, of course. I have just met your extremely handsome but bad-tempered husband in the courtyard, and he says he has forbidden you to go with us to-night. But if I were you I would not be forbidden, and so I came in to give you a word of advice, if you will condescend to take it from me. You are such a dear little thing, and you think I am interfering, but really we are all sorry for you and the way that man treats, and really bullies you."

Iris stared without speaking, and she went on in her purring voice: "And you let him, too. Dr.

Rutherford thought it awful; he told me so. But why do you stand it?"

"I don't know what you mean, and I am sure that Dr. Rutherford never said anything of the sort."

"He did indeed, and I should not take any notice of Mr. Tremayne if I were you. You positively must come to-night. It's too bad of him to try to prevent you, for there's really absolutely no danger."

"Oh, I am not afraid," said Iris quickly. "But I really don't care about it."

"Because you are afraid of your husband! But you might come, because I can't go if you don't."

Iris shook her head, and point-blank refused, but the older woman did not give up. She persuaded and cajoled, working hard until defeat was in sight, when she said desperately:

"You silly child, I suppose you think he has never done anything wrong in his life—that's why you are afraid of disobeying him. But every man has a past which he does not tell his wife, and if wives only knew, they would not be such humble little doormats. You should stick up for yourself, and go where you want to, even out with another man if you wished."

Iris bit her lip. "What rot! Are you suggesting that my husband has a past? I know that he has not, and I have known him all my life."

"Perhaps, but not all *his* life. You are twenty years younger than he is, and you don't suppose you were his very first, do you?"

"I have never thought about it," angrily. "And I don't want to go to-night either."

Mrs. Maddison lit another cigarette, and paused, and after a minute Iris's curiosity got the better of her and she said, exactly as Mrs. Maddison knew she would:

"What are you hinting about my husband—what on earth do you know about him?"

Olive took her cigarette from her lips and blew a cloud of smoke into the air. "Nothing much. He was

just the same about Lady Hammond when he refused to allow you to come to our flat to meet her—and I expect he made up some pretty story to head you off.”

It was Iris's turn to stare. “But Lady Hammond has nothing to do with Geoffrey?”

“She hasn't now, but they used to be awfully thick. I believe he wanted to marry her, but she was rather famous, and wanted a title, but before she got it she evidently didn't object to—well the relations that existed between them. I think he kept her in a flat——”

“I don't believe a word you say,” interrupted Iris. “You just love talking scandal, and I wish you'd go.”

Olive sighed. “Very well, I only spoke for your own benefit. You're rather a simpleton, and you happen to be in love with your own husband. Oh yes, you are. Even if you don't know it yourself, I do, and I don't blame you either, for I'm more than half in love with him myself. But he'll never come back to you until you show a little more spirit, and stop being a slave and a doormat! He's the type of man that likes spirit in a woman; that's why he likes me, and he does like me. You're too soft, and of course he married you because there was no alternative. He treats you like a naughty child all the time, and you let him, instead of sticking up for yourself.”

Iris nodded. She made no movement that could give her tormentor any satisfaction, and yet her astute brain never doubted for a moment that what Olive said was true. Rutherford had let out that Tremayne had been in love with Molly Hammond, and, considering the character of the lady, anything else was quite believable. And though the friendship between Julian Cassillis and the same lady might be merely a coincidence, that would hardly account for his violent objection to their meeting. And, curiously, Iris did not care a bit! In fact, she felt oddly inclined to shriek with laughter. It was frightfully funny, first Tremayne

and Julian and Molly Hammond, and then Julian and Tremayne and herself! Yes, it *was* frightfully funny. And so, after all, they were really equal at last; he was no better than she was.

But the desire to laugh was succeeded by a burning indignation at the way in which Tremayne had treated not only her, but Julian. What right had he to thrash Julian and turn him out of Trelawn?

She looked up. "All right, I will come to-night," she said quietly, "if you want me to. I don't suppose it matters much, and it will be rather a joke after all."

Mrs. Maddison got up, her point won. "I did not mean to say anything about Mr. Tremayne," she said, "and I shouldn't tell him you know, if I were you."

"Thank you," said Iris quietly, "I am not likely to do so, though I think you came into my room for the sole purpose of telling me. I don't care either, so I am afraid it is rather disappointing to you. And now I am afraid I must turn you out——"

* * * * *

Several times that day Tremayne looked at Iris with suspicion in his eyes, but she never once looked back at him, and that night she went early to her room, and when he looked in at bedtime she was evidently asleep.

He slept badly, not knowing why. All the hotel bedrooms opened on to a gallery, leading up from the courtyard by a flight of stairs. On the other side they opened on to another balcony over the street, though standing some way back.

About six in the morning, while he was dozing, a banging door startled him, and he got up and went out on to the balcony to see where it was.

As he stepped out he felt "*It*." There was a wind blowing, warm and suffocating, coming straight from the south, the Sahara, and the great desert, and as it blew, sand and dust came whirling up the little street. The rising sun was obscured by a strange

cloud and the air was curiously still. It was the khamsin, the dreaded voice of the great Sahara !

The door blew to again with a bang, shattering the glass panes, and, turning quickly, Tremayne saw that it was the door of Iris's room. He went forward, to reassure her, in case the crash had wakened her, opened the door wide, and went in.

The room was empty, the bed tidy. . . .

Then he remembered the proposed night ride. He believed that the idea had fallen through, especially as he had heard some talk among the guides on the previous evening about the queer sunset and the chances of a storm. But it was evident that the ride had been carried out, and that Iris was with the party.

Tremayne's anxiety was greater than his anger. He started to dress, but before he had finished there was a loud knock at his door, and when he opened it Maddison stood there, half-dressed and in a great state of agitation.

"I say, Tremayne, what do you think has become of them?" he burst out. "I don't like this damned storm coming on, and all of 'em out in that confounded desert!"

"Is your wife with them," demanded Tremayne, "and not yourself?"

"Yes, you see I was going, but I had neuralgia. It's this wind, and I often get it. But I didn't want to disappoint Olive; she'd set her heart on going, and Jimmie Hill was going too. They'd have been all right—there were two guides."

"My wife was with them also?"

"Yes, and Dawson as well. They went off at midnight, and were to be back at five, but it's nearly half-past six now, and Coddington, the other chap, you know, has just sent me a message that there is a storm raging outside the village in the open; the khamsin is blowing like the devil, and I don't like it. What shall we do?"

Instinctively Tremayne turned and tied his tie. "I will call my servant; he can go out and find out how bad it is. If they don't return in an hour or two, we must ride out ourselves and look for them. Do you know which way they were going?"

"Towards Sidi Okbar; but that is about twenty miles, and my wife is not much of a rider."

Tremayne told him to finish dressing and called March. When March came he sent him down and soon followed, but the party did not return.

The storm increased in violence. All the doors of the houses were closely shut, and only the sound of camels groaning, and the pariah dogs whining, gave signs of life in Biskra. Away in the old village the tufted palms were swaying like corn, and the sun disappeared behind a cloud of fog which seemed to hurl itself through the air, leaving sand and dust everywhere. It roared up the street under the tunnel of mimosa, round the corners of the colonnades, beating upon the doors, shaking the minarets of the hotel and mosques, and rushing round the Cardinal's statue. "This is awful," said Tremayne; "no one could ride in it. They must have sought some native shelter and be in one of the villages."

"And they are none too safe," added the other Englishman.

March came in with some Arab guides. The party had gone out towards Sidi Okbar. Oh, they had not returned—they had not been seen either by any one outside the village. The storm was very bad. Outside the oasis, and the shelter it afforded, it would be impossible for any one to ride abroad; neither man nor beast could stand it. How long would it last? They could not say. A few hours—or two or three days. They had known storms last so long. Yes, they would be in, and near, when it abated, and would obtain horses for Monsieur should the party not have returned.

There was nothing more to do at present, so they

sat down to coffee in the dining-room, with all the windows shut.

It was intensely hot and suffocating, yet even through the cracks the sand penetrated, till they seemed to drink it in their coffee and eat it in their bread. Maddison could not eat. He was much more anxious outwardly than Tremayne, who showed a perfectly calm exterior and ate his usual breakfast.

The day wore on and they did not come. The storm showed no sign of abating, and it was quite evident that what the Arab guides had said was true. No one could ride beyond the village that day.

Wherever they were, if they were alive, they must be in shelter. And the night came—and passed. They made no pretence of going to bed, but sat up fully dressed and waited, hour after hour, till day-break, and another dawn of wind and dark cloud came.

It was not until the afternoon that the wind began to go down and the sand cease to swirl and fill the air. By sunset it was clear, and only the bent trees and sand-covered houses and streets were witness to the fury of the storm.

Tremayne and Maddison were in the saddle almost before the sound of the wind had died away, and their first point of call was the prefecture. Here they hoped at least to find information awaiting them, thinking that even if the little party had been delayed by the storm outside, probably one of the guides would have run in with a message to allay anxiety.

But there was no message at the prefecture. Nothing whatever was known of the English party, and the French police were inclined to look upon it in the same light as Tremayne had done—as an extremely foolish proceeding, and none too safe.

From there they rode to old Biskra to seek the homes of the two guides; but here again they met with no success. Neither had been seen nor heard of for two days.

Darkness fell—and another day had passed. Tre-

mayne went to bed and tried to sleep, knowing the uselessness of sitting up, for Maddison refused to turn in, and would call him instantly if there was any news.

The following day they borrowed a detachment of Spahis from the neighbouring barracks, and rode to Sidi Okbar, scouring the district and making inquiries everywhere—in vain!

The English party had not reached Sidi Okbar. They had not been seen nor heard of, and by that night it seemed as if they had completely vanished, and the illimitable Garden of Allah had swallowed them up.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHEN Iris, feeling rather guilty, and yet still in a fury, crept downstairs through the hall of the hotel to the street door, she found only Major Dawson waiting. He hurried her down the street to the Cardinal's statue, where already Olive Maddison and her faithful Jimmie were mounted and ready, but there was no sign of the lady's husband, and as Iris allowed herself to be mounted, she remarked upon the fact.

"Oh, Len has neuralgia, and did not care about joining us," replied Olive carelessly. "We're used to him, though, aren't we, Jimmie? So we just came along without him. I expect it's the wind that has given it to him."

"There is a wind," said Dawson rather uneasily. "The guides are a bit nervous of a storm, but anyway we shall be back before it breaks. It won't come before dawn."

The road across the desert was narrow, and they rode in twos; Dawson first with his guide, Gattouchi, then the two women, and Jimmie Hill and the other guide last.

"Did you leave the paragon husband asleep safely?" asked Olive. "What a pity he wouldn't come."

"I don't know if he was asleep or not," replied Iris, "and he wouldn't care about this sort of thing. After all, there's nothing in it, and we might just as well have come in the daytime and not missed our sleep like this."

"You have no soul, my dear. I think Mr. Tremayne would have liked it immensely in spite of what he tells you. He told me quite differently the other night when we were on the Minaret together."

"The Minaret!" in astonishment.

"Yes, when you and Dr. Rutherford were saying your tender farewells in the garden, Mr. Tremayne and I were saying our prayers on the top of the Minaret. He told me all sorts of secrets, too. I assure you he appreciated the beauty of the desert then!"

"What nonsense!" retorted Iris. "If Geoffrey went up the Minaret with you, it was because you asked him to take you, and not because he wanted to. Do you want to make a story out of that as well? Why, he would take Mrs. Briggs up if she asked him! Do you think that I don't know?"

"There are lots of things you don't know," said Mrs. Maddison with a hard laugh. "You don't care to know, either. He might take Mrs. Briggs up the tower, but I don't think he would say to her what he said to me, nor would he kiss her——"

"You're a liar! I don't believe a word you say!" exclaimed Iris furiously, and she struck her horse with the little riding whip she carried, and rode on until she caught up Major Dawson.

"I wish I had never come—I wish I had stuck out and not come," she said to herself, sick with anger. "I wish I had turned her out of my room and never listened to a word she said. I don't believe it, not a word—and I wish I were back——"

But there was no going back now, for they were almost at the Soudanese village which they were to visit, and the noise of it was clearly proclaimed by the ghastly sounds of the native instruments, lavishly played by weirdly painted negroes in the horrible pale glare of huge standard torches.

"We'll get down and see what they are doing," said Dawson, and they all dismounted and were welcomed by the rulers of the feast, who led them to seats of

honour, consisting of boards covered with red stuff, where they took their places.

Coffee was served to them in tiny china bowls—Arab coffee, thick and syrupy. Iris shuddered and was afraid to drink it lest it should be drugged. But Dawson assured her on this point, and explained that they were guests and subject to the high laws of Arab hospitality, so she felt obliged to drink it, nauseated by each sip, while the dancing went on.

It was coarse and low, but her mind did not take it in, for she was tired, worried, and very sleepy by now.

After what seemed a long time, faint with the heat, glare and noise, they left and rode on to another village, where they sat through a similar entertainment. They drank more sweet coffee, ate curious sweets, and watched the dancing-girls with their painted faces, their henna-stained finger-tips, and the painted women-dressed men.

Iris loathed it all and longed to get away, but Mrs. Maddison seemed wide awake, and kept up a constant stream of chatter, even jeering at her companions for being too quiet; but even she was not anxious to visit yet another village.

So after leaving this one she suggested a race across the desert track. The storm was coming up fast now, with the approaching dawn; the sand was blowing about and the horses seemed restless, pawing the ground and whinnying at the faint moaning of the rising wind and the queer light in the east.

"We shall have to hurry," said Mrs. Maddison. "So come along, Jimmy, I'll race you for the first five miles——"

They were about that distance south of Sidi Okbar and the track to Biskra lay to the right. Olive caught her horse a sharp rap on his flanks, called to Jimmy Hill, and started off at a canter to the east. In vain the guide shouted after her; in vain Dawson and young Hill spurred their horses and tried to follow her; the rising wind and bank of moving fog, like

sand, shut her completely off from sight and sound and got into their eyes, choked them, and they lost her.

"We shall have to follow, and we cannot leave you, Mrs. Tremayne, so I am afraid you will have to come too," said Dawson. "It's the wrong road, but when we catch Mrs. Maddison up, we can turn back. The guides know the way, and when it is lighter we shall have no difficulty. She will not go very far in this sandstorm either."

They started off at a sharp trot down the uneven sand track. Iris was a good rider, for she had ridden much as a child, but even she had difficulty in keeping her seat, for the ground was full of holes, and here and there were quite deep ditches. Jimmy Hill went ahead with Gattouchi, and after some time he suddenly appeared in front of them, looming out of the fog; he looked pale and horribly scared, even in the uncertain light.

"Mrs. Maddison is here," he said. "But I think she is badly hurt. She must have been thrown, and there is no sign of her horse."

The dawn was coming now, but there were black clouds appearing from all sides of the horizon, and the wind was rising. Olive Maddison lay in a crumpled heap on the sand. She looked as if she were dead, and as she dismounted Iris thought she was.

She was very frightened and tired herself, and she had no knowledge of first aid. But, fortunately, Dawson had, though it was of little avail, for they could not do anything.

It was found that she had fallen on her head, and that in addition, her arm was undoubtedly broken.

"We cannot get her back to Biskra like this," said Dawson. "I wonder if there is a village near to which we could go and put her down, while one of us rides to Biskra for help. This khamsin is the very devil. We can't go far in it anyway."

They questioned the guides anxiously, and obtained the information that there was a small oasis, with the customary cluster of mud-huts which served for a village, about two miles off.

So they lifted Olive Maddison, white as death and all limp, on to Dawson's horse, and he and Jimmy Hill held her on between them, while they took the slow march towards the bunch of palms which the guides indicated, or rather told them of, for they could not see it till they were right upon it. Gattouchi rode ahead to waken the inhabitants and ask for food and shelter for the "roumis."

It was just daylight when they rode in and were received by an old man who called himself the sheik; and after the briefest of greetings they were hastily bundled off their horses into the shelter of a mud-hut hastily put at their disposal. For the storm had broken, and no Arab wishes to put his head out of doors when the khamsin is blowing.

The village consisted of a circular street, with huts of all sizes on both sides. The huts had narrow doorways, across which boards were loosely fixed to form doors, and there were square apertures for windows. The one into which they were almost thrown was fairly large, and dirty in the extreme. At the back a passage in the mud-wall led evidently into an inner room of the same hut, into which, in all probability, the entire members of the occupying family had retired. Occasionally heads looked round at them; and they saw haggard women with skinny arms, holding their meagre garments in front of them as veils, and little woolly-haired children with sore eyes, sometimes blind, and now and again fowls and dogs.

Iris shuddered as she looked upon them, but she was too sensible and healthy to collapse. She helped them lay the injured woman down on some fresh straw which Gattouchi obtained, and they tried to force some brandy down her throat; they washed her wounds as well as they could, for there was practically no

clean water, and of course there was no medical aid nearer than Biskra.

And while the storm lasted there was no possibility of getting help from any source.

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How that day and the next passed, Iris never knew.

Mrs. Maddison lay unconscious most of the time, sometimes moaning, and sometimes half-delirious with the pain and discomfort. Sometimes she asked for her husband, and sometimes she talked of Tremayne, and asked for him. The men were in the hut with them, day and night, though they did their best to make themselves unobtrusive. Indeed Dawson proved himself as efficient a nurse as could be, and helped Iris in every way, while Jimmy Hill helped Gattouchi to obtain regular supplies of food and water. Iris had plenty of money on her, but Dawson warned her to keep it well hidden, for avarice is one of the besetting sins of the Arab.

They brought her brown bread of Arab baking, as sold in the markets. It was rather sour, but quite eatable, and she managed to drink the coffee and goat's milk, but she could not touch the "cous-cous," nor the meat cooked in rancid oil, which was all that was offered to them.

On the second evening, when the storm had abated and the sun was once more shining, it was suggested that one of the men had better ride back to Biskra for help, but the question was, which?

There was no doubt that Olive Maddison was very ill, and Iris wanted Dawson to stay with her, lest anything should happen.

He was some help, but Jimmy Hill, young and good-natured, but utterly inexperienced, was no good either to stay or go. He was not a good rider, and Biskra was thirty odd miles away and the road was uncertain. And they could not spare the guide Gattouchi, as he was the interpreter.

So it had to be the other guide, and he did not know

the way, and consequently had to walk and take with him a man who did know it.

That night Iris sat beside her companion from sunset to sunrise. She could do nothing but bathe Olive's head with the lukewarm water they had and from time to time give her sips of brandy and goat's milk. Her arm was giving her great pain, for it was only roughly bandaged to her side, and not even set nor cleared of the shattered bone. They had no splints, and if they had, Dawson was afraid of doing more harm by treating her wrongly from lack of skill.

Once some Arab women came by and looked in through the door. They were unveiled women, with tattooed faces, gold rings in their ears and kohl in their eyes; they pointed henna-stained fingers at the fair Englishwomen, looking at them full of admiration.

Some young Arabs came by, staring with bold eyes at Iris's beautiful hair and exquisite fairness. They came again, hanging round and smiling, and Dawson was not a little uneasy, and consequently anxious to keep the other Englishman with them, knowing that another vice of the Arab race is women, and Iris Tremayne was fair—fair, and had gold on her!

Iris was oblivious to all such dangers. She was so sick and tired in body and mind with her long vigil, and fears for Olive Maddison, that she cared for nothing, and saw hardly anything of the passing people. Once when an old woman stopped and looked at the unconscious woman, and muttered something, she turned to Gattouchi, who was squatting on his heels outside the hut, and asked him what the woman said.

"She says that the spirit of the European is passing," he answered carelessly.

Iris shivered. She began to wonder if she would ever see England and Trelawn again. She even thought of the cheery hotel in Algiers, the patient Harrod waiting for her return. What would she not have given for Harrod now, for a bath and clean

clothes ! And oh, what would she not have given for Tremayne, or Rutherford, to have helped her now, to have taken charge of Olive, and removed the dreadful sense of responsibility. Rutherford would have managed to set that fractured arm, and brought her round, while Tremayne would have looked after them, and found some means of getting all of them back to Biskra. But the two men with them, though they were kind, and undoubtedly did their best, were hopelessly incompetent.

Once during the night Mrs. Maddison regained consciousness and asked where they were and why her arm was so painful, but she could not move. Very soon, however, she grew restless and wandered off again into delirium, repeatedly talking of Tremayne and asking for him—and all the while his wife sat and listened.

Finally, with the dawn, Iris saw her fall into a stupor, and she herself, wearied out with watching, fell asleep on the straw near the door, her small face pillowed on her cloak, and her loose hair falling round her shoulders. Jimmy Hill was asleep with his back to the mud-wall, and only Dawson was awake, standing in the doorway, unclean and unshaven, watching the sun rise in all its wondrous splendour over the eastern horizon of sand and dunes, when at length Tremayne, Maddison, and six Spahis rode into the village.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TREMAYNE pushed by Gattouchi, Dawson and Jimmie Hill, and the gathering loiterers who witnessed their arrival, as he strode into the hut, looking neither right nor left, but directly at his wife.

He went over and knelt beside her. "Thank God you're safe, my darling," he said, and kissed her golden hair without caring who saw him do it.

Iris wakened at his touch and sprang to her feet. "Oh, Geoffrey! I am glad to see you, I am glad you've come!" she cried. "I thought you were never coming."

"I came as soon as we got the message from the guide this morning at dawn. Are you all right—well—not hurt in any way?"

"Oh, no, I'm all right—" she clung to him as if she would never let him go again—"only I am so tired, and so dirty and hungry." Then she remembered, and turned. "It's Mrs. Maddison——"

"What is the matter with her?" He let her go abruptly and turned also. "Good God! she isn't dead?"

Olive Maddison opened her eyes just then and looked straight at him. "No, I'm not dead; I was not going to die until I had seen you again," she said. She was not really conscious, but it seemed to Iris that she was, and all that she had heard came crowding back.

She drew herself away from Tremayne who was still holding her hand, and began to explain what had happened, the two men joining in, anxious to tell the story.

"We must get her back to Biskra at all risks," said Tremayne, bending over her where her husband was kneeling. "I am afraid she is very ill. Why on earth did not one of you men ride in before?" he added, his face grave and lined, as he looked at Olive lying as if she were dead. Dawson explained the position. It did not reflect much credit upon the physique of young Hill that he was considered neither fit to go nor to stay, but there it was.

"Mrs. Tremayne could have done the ride. She is a good rider, but it would not have been safe for a woman alone, especially a girl like she is——"

"Good God! what an idea," barked Tremayne. "You seem to be a couple of fools."

It was no use saying that now, however. The thing was to get to work as quickly as possible, to feed the three sound persons, and to do all possible for the injured; this Tremayne had to manage himself, for Maddison was no more use than his friend, and he was afraid to let either Iris or Dawson touch her because their hands were so dirty—begrimed not only with sand, but with contact with the dirty mud of the hut. Their clothes also were as bad.

"I really think you might have been able to get some water and wash her clean," he said rather reproachfully to Iris, who did not even answer. In fact, since their first greeting she had hardly spoken, nor had he looked at her. He devoted his attention entirely to Olive. If she had cared less, Iris would have cried, but she had been through too much and was dazed with it all.

"One of the Spahis must ride back to Biskra," said Tremayne, taking command as usual and issuing orders right and left. "One of the officers there has a car; he put it at my disposal yesterday. We can get Mrs. Maddison back in that. And meanwhile I have brought brandy, food and coffee with me, for I expect you are all hungry and want some stimulant."

He gave his commands, and in a very few minutes

the swiftest of the Spahis, on his Arab horse, started again for Biskra, and the others were helping to unpack the food, make a fire, and cook a meal. They were all of them hungry, and the sight of the appetizing English food soon tempted them all to eat a hearty breakfast. Tremayne tried to give Mrs. Maddison something, but it was no good, and the knowledge that she had had practically nothing to eat for four days was not cheering.

"The car is small," he said to Iris, "and of course Mrs. Maddison must lie flat, and we must take her husband, too, so I think you had better ride if you can, and are not too tired."

Iris was rather a pitiful figure herself. She had not had her clothes off for three nights, her dress was stained and torn, and half her hairpins were gone, but she nodded—

"Yes, I can ride. And I have my cloak."

"I brought you a coat also. Then I think as soon as you have finished your meal, you had better start with Major Dawson and Mr. Hill. Two of the Spahis will go with you, and the guides will follow with us and the car."

She did not reply, and he took her silence for consent, and spoke no more to her till the meal was over. Gattouchi brought the horses round and then he mounted her himself and said: "I hope you will be all right. I will see you this evening at the hotel. Go straight to bed after you have had a bath."

And the last Iris remembered of Bal-el-min, the village where these three terrible days had been spent, was the sight of Tremayne, standing in the doorway in the morning sunlight, with a background of natives at a respectful distance. The three handsome, stalwart Spahis, mounted on their magnificent horses, like bronze statues clad in gorgeous uniform, were on guard in the street.

* * * * *

It was afternoon when they rode into Biskra, for

it had been a long ride. But they were still ahead of the car.

Iris did not look at her companions or even speak to them when they eventually drew rein before the Royal Hotel. She had scarcely spoken the whole way, and they put it down to fatigue and discomfort; but they did think it strange of her to dismount and go inside without a word.

An American woman staying in the hotel, Mrs. Briggs, was waiting anxiously with the French manageress, and seized at once upon her to "tell them all about it," but she passed them too, with an excuse about wanting a bath, and left the men to do the telling. She went upstairs to her own room, where the French chambermaid helped her to undress and prepared a bath for her.

That over, she went to bed, and in half an hour she was sound asleep.

She did not waken until the sun was up the next morning, and she did not hear Tremayne come in softly through the window-door, not once but many times, and stand beside her, watching her with a prayer of thankfulness on his lips that she was safe and uninjured; listening to her breathing, rejoicing that she was alive and well, and protecting her while she slept from every sound and light which might disturb her.

It was like this almost all through the night, as if he could not bear to let her out of his sight again; but when she awakened she was alone, lying in her comfortable little bed, with the sun filtering through the green shutters and the pleasant sound of a flute in her ears, playing far away.

She rang for the maid and ordered coffee; and when the girl brought it she questioned her eagerly. "Had Mrs. Maddison been brought safely to Biskra?"

"Mais oui!" Madame had arrived late in the day, soon after "petite madame" had fallen asleep. She had been undressed, washed, and put to bed by Mrs

Briggs, and the doctor had come and gone. But alas ! poor madame was very ill. She had not seen her since they carried her in, but she heard her moaning when she had taken hot water to the room, and alas, she feared madame was going to die !

Iris dismissed her and drank her coffee ; then for a while she lay and thought about it all. And the worst part of it was the memory of Olive Maddison, lying in pain and delirium, talking about Tremayne, and her words as they had ridden over the desert together. Whether she lived or died, Iris knew that she would never forgive her or be the same to her ; neither, at that moment, did she think that she would ever forgive Tremayne.

Presently she got up and dressed, and was hurrying down to see where everybody was, when Tremayne came in with a gentle knock.

He looked darker, and graver, if possible, than before, though his eyes softened as he looked at her—herself again.

“ How do you feel ? ” he asked “ Better, I hope ; you look more like yourself now.”

“ Yes, I am quite all right, thanks.” She was pinning on her broad-brimmed hat, and did not pause. “ I am rested and clean now ; I was coming to look for you, or some one, to see how Mrs. Maddison is.”

“ She is very ill, and does not seem likely to recover.”

“ Oh dear, and I expect that rough drive across that horrible road must have hurt her terribly.” She tried to instil some sympathy into her voice and to feel sorry, but it was not a great success.

“ She was quite unconscious, so I don't think it mattered much. She is in a high fever now, however, and I am afraid that blood poisoning will set in, even if it has not already happened.”

Iris looked at him half-wonderingly. “ Who is nursing her ? ”

“ Mrs. Briggs is there ; there are no French nurses in Biskra, but we have sent to Algiers for one, and for

a doctor from the British hospital. There isn't much hope, but we must do what we can, of course."

He spoke (so Iris thought) as if he had a very personal interest in the case, and as if, with Mrs. Briggs, he was nursing her.

"Where is Mr. Maddison?" she asked.

"He's no use," said Tremayne contemptuously. "He's prostrate with grief or something, and he doesn't help any more than the other two fools do."

"I wonder you don't send for Dr. Rutherford. He can't have left Algiers yet, for he was to sail on the fourth, and that's next Sunday."

Tremayne looked hard at her. "I think we can manage without Rutherford," he said calmly. "All things considered, I am glad you are no worse for your adventures; you deserve to be, you know, more than Mrs. Maddison does."

"I?" in angry astonishment. "Why? It was not my idea to go on that stupid expedition. It would not have made any difference either if I had not been with them. She would have gone just the same."

"I don't think so. If you had obeyed me no one would have gone, I fancy."

"Yes, she would, and anyway it was her own fault that she was thrown and hurt. I have more sense than to race across a sand track in the dark. I can't think why she did such an idiotic thing; otherwise we should have got back all right."

"Well, it's no use rubbing it in now," impatiently. "You had your share in it; and I must go back——"

"Back?"

"And see if there is anything else wanted—anything I can do——"

"Of course, I will go down too. I suppose I can't do anything, help Mrs. Briggs with the nursing, or anything else? I don't *want* to, as I'm not in love with Mrs. Maddison, as you know, but I'll do what I can."

"And in what spirit?" Tremayne swung round angrily. "I believe you are utterly heartless; no, don't go, you are no nurse and could not be of any help."

Iris was stung. "I did what I could, all the same, those days we were away," she said. "But I cannot make myself like a woman who——" she broke off, and then added: "It's different with you——"

"Yes," he replied coldly. "But do not go, since you do not like her; your presence would only irritate her. If she lives until Friday the nurses will be here, and in the meantime Mrs. Briggs will do all that is necessary. Now I must go. What are you going to do? I should rest, if I were you."

"Yes. Are you going to Mrs. Maddison now?"

Something in her voice arrested him. "Why? Do you object?"

"I have no right to object, I suppose. But it seems strange, when she has a husband, that you should go. I should not like another man——"

"The comparison is absurd; Maddison, as I have told you, is useless; also I feel some responsibility for what has happened. I do not say the fault is all yours, but it was you who made it all possible."

Iris's eyes passed him to the view beyond the balcony. "Yes, of course," she said. She knew that.

* * * * *

Three long weary days. Iris wondered how they passed. There was no change and no improvement in Mrs. Maddison's condition. As they feared, septic poisoning had set in, in the arm, and the only chance for her life was to amputate it as soon as the English doctor arrived from Algiers. The French doctor in Biskra could not undertake it alone, even if he had the skill, which seemed doubtful, and meanwhile she was still in a high fever.

The doctor and nurse were expected by the afternoon train on the fourth day, and that morning Iris went out early before the sun was hot. She had not

slept, and was worrying, not about Olive, but about Tremayne and his devotion to her, in which not unnaturally she could see confirmation of everything she had heard. And to crown it all, as she passed the open door of the smoke-room on her way in, she heard Dawson and Jimmie Hill talking.

"Well, she's got her heart's desire," young Hill was saying. "She played for him, she wanted him, and now she has got him! He's been there all the time. I wonder Maddison stands it, only he thinks she is going to die, and wants to make her happy."

"I wonder his wife likes it," said the other man. "A beautiful women like that! But she's a poor little fool when all's said and done. Hasn't a bob of her own, I expect, and is dependent on him for every damn thing in life. Rough on these women, you know——"

Iris went on. She disliked the man, but she knew he spoke the truth, and it burnt her. "A poor little fool!" Yes, that was what she was. And "dependent on him for every damn thing in life"! She could have laughed if it had not all been such a tragedy, and as she went upstairs Iris made up her mind at last to be no longer the fool she appeared.

She did not see Tremayne all the morning, but heard that the patient was worse. He came in to lunch and told them that he had been to the post office and received the information that the doctor had left Algiers the previous evening and would arrive that day.

Iris did not speak. She ate her lunch, and then went up into her room and waited. Presently Tremayne came into his room, and she got up and went and stood in the doorway.

"Geoffrey."

He turned. "Yes?"

"I want to speak to you, will you come in?"

He came at once. "What is the matter?"

Iris went back to the dressing-table and stood a moment fingering the silver toilet things nervously.

"You said at lunch the doctor and nurse would be here this afternoon; then there won't be anything more for you to do."

"No, I suppose not. But why?"

"You won't be required to run in and out of Mrs. Maddison's room all day!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we can leave to-morrow and go home. I am absolutely sick of being here, and if you are no longer necessary, I can't see why we should stay."

"I don't expect you can," said Tremayne quietly. "But from my point of view it would be impossible and utterly inhuman of us to leave just now, until there is some change in Mrs. Maddison's condition; and although there will be proper doctors and nurses, I expect there will be a good many things I shall be wanted for still."

"Mrs. Maddison is no relation of ours and you have done everything a man could do in these days. We could go now."

"I cannot go. Maddison expects me to see him through; the other men are no good."

"Still——"

"Oh, please don't argue. You are none the worse for your fool-trick, and it is not fair of you to want to leave, especially under the circumstances."

Iris looked at him. "Why? It was not my fault. I did not want to go, indeed I did not want to after you objected, but she came in here and literally worried me into it. She said she could not go unless I did."

"She could not have made you go."

"She did. That's just what she did do; she said something——" Iris hesitated. She wanted to justify herself, but she did not want to tell him what had passed, not yet at least, nor how much she knew. "She laughed at me for being such a fool as to listen to, and obey, you. She said that you would admire me

much more if I disobeyed you, and—well, honestly, she made me want to annoy you and get even with you.”

Tremayne stared. “Rather a mixed explanation, and it does not ring very true either. Mrs. Maddison didn’t want to annoy me, did she?”

“No.” Iris spoke rather low and quickly. “She didn’t, she wanted to get even with me, and it was an opportunity of making more trouble between you and me; then she would have a chance——”

“You are talking nonsense, like an hysterical woman!” interrupted Tremayne. “Please confine yourself to the subject in question.”

“Yes, certainly.” She laughed bitterly. “The question is—I am sick of Biskra. I can do nothing, and I never see you; therefore I want to know if we may leave to-morrow?”

“And I repeat, that until we know how Mrs. Maddison is, we may not.”

“Then may I go alone?”

“Where to?”

“Anywhere; I don’t care as long as I leave this place.”

“You can’t go alone, and you forget that you told me to send your maid home, and she will have gone. You can’t go without me.”

“I will not stay here another day!”

“Oh yes, you will.” Tremayne smiled provokingly, and his voice was equally so. “You have said that you will not before to me, and you know it’s no use; you have to obey me in the end.”

“I will not obey you this time—I *will* not. I’ve given in to you too often, and I’m tired of it. I’m tired of being treated like a moral leper, just because of something that happened years and years ago. It’s not fair! Are we to be answerable all our lives for what we do when we are seventeen? Did you never have a love affair when you were young that you don’t like to remember, and that does you no

credit? Have you always been the saint you profess to be—above temptation—above reproach?"

Tremayne fell back—more astonished than angry. "What are you talking about? I have never professed to be either above temptation or reproach, neither do I treat you as a moral leper. I never heard such rubbish."

"You do! You do! Ever since the day you turned Julian out of Trelawn you have been horrid to me, and it's not fair. You would have done anything I asked you to before that. You would not have asked me to stay here for the sake of another woman, and I'm not going to do it now. If you won't come, I shall go alone."

Tremayne shrugged his shoulders. "All right, go!" he flung at her. "You won't do it—I know you."

"If I go, I shall never return to you."

"Never is a long time, my dear Iris; you would have to return to me because you are dependent on me, and you are not competent to earn your own living, as your father knew perfectly well when he told you so and gave you into my care."

Iris turned on him then like a tigress. "You told me once that you were glad daddy was dead and could not know about my—sin. I tell you now, that I am glad daddy is dead and cannot know how you have failed in your trust! Daddy intended me to be happy, and believed you would make me so, and be kind to me. You have not been so, and I am miserable. I would rather work as a domestic servant than be your wife and dependent on your horrible charity. I can work, in spite of all you say."

"Oh, please stop this argument." Tremayne turned towards the door. "I have had quite enough of it. You are not feeling well, and had better lie down."

Iris became quiet then. "Geoffrey, will you arrange for a separation between us? We are not happy

together, and it would surely be better for us to live apart than go on like this ! ”

Tremayne was angry and upset, a great deal more so than he showed to her, and did not stop to think what he was saying. “ I think it would be quite a good thing,” he snapped. “ We are certainly not happy together as you say, and I have no doubt it can be arranged if you wish it,” but a sudden chill went through him as he spoke. “ When we get back to London I will speak to my lawyer about it, and see what can be done.”

There was a knock and he went back into his room and opened the door.

It was one of the Arab servants. “ Mrs. Briggs sends a message, will you please come to No. 7. Mrs. Maddison asks for you very much—all the time——”

“ Yes, I will come in a moment,” answered Tremayne. He shut the door again and went back and stood in the doorway between the rooms. Iris had heard the message and was facing him.

“ I think our argument is finished,” he said, coldly.

“ It is not finished,” and her eyes flashed at him. “ I strongly object to your going to Mrs. Maddison every time she asks for you. You objected to my going out with Dr. Rutherford, and you were barely civil to him ; you turned Julian Cassillis out of Trelawn. You said they talked about me in the hotel here—it was not true ; but they are talking about you. I’ve heard them myself. Everybody knows Mrs. Maddison ran after you, and it’s only just her whim to have you always there, and to annoy me ! ”

“ Don’t be a little fool,” retorted Tremayne, as angry as herself. “ I must go. I can’t back out of it.”

“ I wonder her husband stands you there always, but, as you say, he’s no good. You don’t know what he says about you. Oh, you needn’t look at me as if I were insane, she told me a great deal.”

“ There’s nothing to tell you.”

"Isn't there ! That's what you say, and it won't bear explaining, and anyway you would not speak the truth."

"Iris !"

"Well ! You would not. All men lie, even Mrs. Maddison says so, and I know it's true. Are you going to her ?"

"Yes."

"You will be sorry——"

"It's no use threatening me."

She dropped her hands to her side. "Very well then, go ! But—yes—go ! She might die without you."

He turned on his heel and went out without another word, and the door shut.

Then Iris did a strange thing. She opened her bag, took out an old letter lying therein, and tore it into little pieces in a heap on the table. Then she sat down and cried.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AFTER a very few tears, obstinate determination settled upon Iris. She got up and locked the doors. It was five minutes past two by her clock, and luncheon in the hotel was a thing of the past. At this time of the day no one was about in the streets, even in the cool season, except those arriving and leaving by the daily train which came in at 2.30 and left again at 3 o'clock.

With great deliberation Iris went and ruthlessly turned out from her dressing-case the tortoiseshell and silver fittings which were a wedding present from Tremayne. She rapidly packed it with all the clothes and necessities for a journey to England. It was surprising how much of her fine clothes it held, and she finished packing it in less than half an hour. She then hastily changed her dress for a practical serge coat and skirt, and a useful travelling hat, and, with her heavy fur coat on her arm, was quite ready.

She had plenty of money for Tremayne was always generous in that way, and though she loved pretty things, Iris had been brought up to such economical habits that she did not spend nearly all her allowance, or want to waste it on trifles. She had no love for jewellery, and no one to send or to give money to, so it saved itself. But this Tremayne did not know, or he might have been more careful in talking of her dependence. Now came the trouble. It was easy enough to pick up her case and go boldly downstairs and through the hall, for, fortunately, it was not

necessary to go through the courtyard, and there was no one about anywhere else, but when it came to the street it was a different matter. The case was heavy, and the sun was hot. It was at least a mile to the station, and an Englishwoman, alone, carrying a heavy case, could not fail to attract attention even among the veriest loiterers. It did not attract an Arab guide, however, sitting sleepily on his heels outside the hotel, waiting patiently for custom.

Iris touched him, and he woke into life. "I will give you five francs if you will carry my case to the station," she said. "It is necessary that I catch the train which leaves at three."

The boy sprang up with alacrity. Neither size nor weight troubled him. He was beaming with smiles in an instant, and began to talk in the usual bad French, to which Iris made no reply.

Up the street, past the Cardinal's statue, and the little church, under the tunnel of mimosa-trees, they walked. Far away there sounded, as always, the sweet clear notes of a flute, and the air it played, one she had heard every and all day while she had been in Biskra, was imprinted upon her memory for ever. Just a few notes, but they never could be forgotten, nor fail to remind her of the gate of the desert.

The train was in the station when she reached it, and in the hurry, noise and bustle of the travelling Arabs, and a squadron of the Legion just arrived, she slipped by unnoticed, and while the boy put her case in the train and got her a seat, she went and bought her ticket. "Here is the five francs I promised you," she said to the boy. "And here is another, if you will not tell any one you have seen me."

The engine whistled, the crowd gave a last shout, and the train steamed slowly out, leaving the heart of the oasis behind the gate of the desert, and passing into the sandy wastes that stretch as far as El Kantara.

Iris sank back on the dusty cushions, almost gasp-

ing. . . . At last she was free. She had gone, and he could not follow her.

* * * * *

It was a long, weary journey. She tipped the guard so handsomely to lock her compartment, and let her be alone, that he watched over and guarded her like a precious piece of luggage, and at Batna, where they halted for a meal, he took her himself to the buffet, and ordered her some dinner. She was not hungry though, and the long dark night seemed endless. She could not sleep for the jolting over the uneven track; she remained awake, alone, and a prey to every misgiving and fear.

But it ended at last, and they reached Algiers without mishap about nine in the morning.

Inquiries at the station proved that there was a nice hotel in the town, not far from the quay, and Iris drove to it with her modest dressing-case, asked for breakfast, and for some writing-paper.

It was only a chance, as she knew. Rutherford ought to be on his way to England now, but it was just possible that he might have been delayed and be still there. Anyway it was worth writing a letter to see, and if so, to ask him whether he would help her to get home. If not, and he had gone, she would have to collect her luggage from the hotel at Mustapha Superieur, and go on by herself.

She dispatched the letter by a hotel messenger, and then went into breakfast, finding herself the only English visitor in the room, much to her embarrassment, as in Africa women do not travel unaccompanied unless they have at least a maid with them. She drank her coffee in a sheltered corner and waited impatiently for a reply, wondering very much if he would come, even if he were there.

He did come. Rutherford himself, clean, trim, and smiling, but with a rather mystified expression, walked into the room, and held out his hand as she sprang to her feet.

"My dear Mrs. Tremayne, whatever brings you here?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you—" she ignored his question—"I was so afraid you had left. You said the fourth, and it's the fifth. I have had such a horrid all-night journey. I've come from Biskra by myself."

"You haven't come from Biskra all by yourself? You had to! But why? What is the matter? Where is your husband? Has anything happened?" His voice was anxious, and suddenly Iris felt again a poor little fool. She hardly knew how to explain, it all seemed so paltry now. "I ran away," she said in a small voice. "I could not stand it any longer, and I want to go home."

"When are you going?"

"To-night; the boat sails at midnight, I think."

"But tell me—where is your husband?"

"He's in Biskra, of course; I quarrelled with him, and then I ran away. I asked him to let me go home, but he wouldn't come, and so I left him."

Rutherford sat down beside her; he looked grave now, and worried. "My dear child, tell me the whole story, and then perhaps I shall understand. Something very serious must have occurred to make you leave your husband like this and want to go home without him."

Iris nodded; then she told him, and somehow it sounded all wrong—and very small. There was no romance in it, not even the romance which Rutherford had brought into the desert, and it made her look very foolish in her own eyes, and rather heartless. She had run away because Tremayne had insisted on going to Mrs. Maddison when she sent for him, and because he had refused to leave her until he knew how she was going on. Of course it was not that at all, but Iris could not tell even Rutherford the rest—what Mrs. Maddison had said, and the story of their unhappy married life. In the desert it had

seemed possible that he would understand ; but now she knew that he could not ; he was a charming man, but——

“Do you want me to take you home with me ?” he asked abruptly.

“Yes, please,” said Iris meekly. “I won’t be any trouble to you, I am so accustomed to travelling ; but I have never been quite alone.”

“You certainly must not go alone ; but what about your husband ? He must know.”

“Why ? He would not come himself.”

“I don’t think it was quite that. Perhaps he really felt that he could not leave ; but, anyway, he must be told. You cannot contemplate going home to London without letting him know where you are. Why—he might think you had had some accident.”

“Serve him right if he did,” replied Iris viciously. “I certainly did not mean to let him know.”

“I really cannot take you, my dear child, unless you send him word ; it would be most unfair, besides” —with a laugh—“he might think that I had run away with you !”

“What nonsense, how could he ? But you don’t understand, Dr. Rutherford ; I’m not going to return to Geoffrey at all.”

“That of course remains to be decided when you are both in London again ; but if that is your present determination, then it is all the more necessary that you should write or wire to him, telling him where you are ; and I, with your permission, shall also let him know that I am escorting you to London. Do you see ? Otherwise there might be complications and difficulties.”

Iris did see ; she saw that Rutherford was a man of the world ; and that though he would be a friend, and advise and help her, he was not going to risk himself and his name in her cause.

Of course, looking at it in the cold morning light of reason, she could not expect any other answer. She

had known him barely a month, and he had known and respected Tremayne for twenty years. No, of course he would not help her, and she ought to have known it.

"If I let him know where I am, he may follow me," she objected.

"I expect he will, by the very first train," he replied smilingly. "I expect he is most frightfully cut up, poor chap! I can imagine what his feelings were when he found you were gone."

"I am glad. I don't want ever to see him again."

"Now, you don't mean that, Mrs. Tremayne; you are angry and upset, but you will feel different presently and you would be sorry if I took you at your word and helped you to run away. I couldn't do it either. I wouldn't help any woman to run away from her husband, and I am sure in your case there is no reason for it. Tremayne is one of the best."

"Of course," murmured Iris with intense bitterness. "But you will take me to England with you?"

"If you wish it, yes; but are you sure you would not rather wait here for your husband? Madame Brut will put you up at the hotel. They are not full now, and——"

"No, I want to go home. I must go now."

"Very well, then, I will see about it, but we must tell your husband."

He began to ask her about Mrs. Maddison, and Iris had unwillingly to tell him all about the accident, and the cause. Rutherford seemed surprised and reproachful that they had not sent for him and said he would have gone. Iris had to say that they thought he had left.

"I hate her," she added childishly, but Rutherford only patted her hand as if she were a little girl, and smiled at her.

"Well, well, we shall see what will happen when you get home," he said. "I do not suppose your husband will allow you to work, but we must unite

you again first. Believe me, I will do all I can to help you both."

Iris did believe him. She knew, too, what that meant. He would take care of her and in due time hand her back to Tremayne.

He would not saddle himself with her, nor help her to run away and be independent. He would just take her home and send for her husband.

She waited till he had gone, after promising to get her steamer ticket for her and book her a cabin on the night boat, and then she sat down and wrote to Tremayne, with neither recriminations nor apologies.

"I am going back to England and Dr. Rutherford is acting as my escort. We sail to-night, and when I am there I am going to find some work as soon as I can, so that I shall not be dependent upon you any more. I will send you my address as soon as I am settled, and will you please do as we suggested and arrange for a complete and legal separation between us?"

"I am not ungrateful to you, but I would rather work now and try to be happy. And I don't want to see you again.

"IRIS TREMAYNE."

* * * * *

Three days later they arrived in London.

The journey was uneventful, and they had scarcely spoken all the way. They met at meals, and he did everything for her comfort and took great care of her; but she had not been slow to notice that he was not the man he had been in Biskra, and treated her merely as a "charge" and a friend's wife.

So that from longing to confide in him, as she had done on her journey from Biskra, Iris came to the conclusion that she could not tell him a single thing. He would be as condemnatory as Tremayne himself, and most certainly he would not understand.

At last, when they were in the train from Folkestone to London, Rutherford asked Iris where she was going to stay when they arrived in town, and what she intended to do.

Iris mentioned the Queen Anne Hotel where her grandmother used to stay. It was a quiet place near the British Museum, and Rutherford quite approved.

"I shall be able to look after you and come and see you every day," he said in a fatherly tone. "That is, of course, until your husband arrives. I expect he will be here in a few days. He would come as soon as he got my telegram."

"If Mrs. Maddison would let him," murmured Iris.

All the way in the train Iris listened meekly to good advice; to wise and sensible counsel concerning young wives and good husbands, and the sense in not quarrelling, but being, as St. Paul expressed it, "in subjection." He meant well, but the romance of the desert was dead. He was merely a middle-aged friend, and he would not have understood if she had told him any more.

"He would think me silly and wicked," thought Iris as she watched the fields and hedges of old England fly by. "The only person who ever understood was Julian."

And so the idea was born.

She said no more, and agreed to go to the quiet hotel and stay there until Tremayne arrived to claim and take her home. She talked no more of work and freedom; and by the time they arrived Rutherford was quite convinced that she was thoroughly repentant and ready to return to her husband.

He took her himself to the hotel and promised to call every day to see that she was safe.

* * * * *

There was a telegram from Tremayne on the Tuesday when she had been three days in town. It was sent to Rutherford from Paris in reply to his

message, and said that he would arrive in London the following night, and would call upon him in Harley Street at ten o'clock on Thursday morning.

“I will see him and send him straight on to you,” said the doctor when he took it round to show Iris.

She read it and nodded. “Thank you very much,” she said politely. “It is very kind of you,” but she did not look at him as she spoke.

CHAPTER XXXV

TREMAYNE went down the long gallery to No 7. It was at the back and looked on to a quiet side street. This afternoon the green blinds were drawn and it was cool and dim.

Olive Maddison was the skeleton of her former self. She was as white as her pillows and her black hair framed her face like jet.

She had no hand to offer him, but she smiled, and said :

"Sit down, please," and then: "They have told me everything, and how you fetched us back from that horrible village. They have not told me I am going to die, but I know I am, and I wanted to speak to you before the doctor and nurses come and won't let me talk. And please don't begin to say you are sorry and all that sort of thing because I know it all, and there isn't much time. Later on——"

"But why talk?" said Tremayne, sitting down to humour her. "You will only tire yourself. Just remember our pleasant acquaintanceship and nothing else."

"No." She shook her head. "I have hated your wife and done you a great injury, and I must tell you about it."

It was a halting story she told, and sometimes he could hardly hear or believe her. It seemed almost absurd to him that a woman like this should have had such an infatuation for him (there was no other word for it), that she was willing to go to any lengths, even to lie, to gain his favour, or even his tolerance. for

he could not suppose that she would expect much more. But at the same time the injury was there and had been deliberately done. She had told Iris about him and Molly Hammond, which was just the one thing he would rather that Iris had not known. Of course Mrs. Maddison did not herself understand the magnitude of her offence, and he could not possibly explain. Iris knew about Lady Hammond and Cassillis, because he had told her himself, and now she knew this, too, so that he could no longer taunt her with her wrongdoing.

A man's past is different, it is true, but still he had been so hard on Iris and poor Cassillis, who had been considerably younger than he.

The rest, about himself and Mrs. Maddison, was ridiculous to his way of thinking, but would it appear ridiculous to Iris? She was already up in arms and ready to believe the worst, and quite naturally, too, after what this woman had been pouring into her ears for days.

"You will never forgive me!" she cried pathetically, and what could he say?

"Of course I forgive you. You did not mean to do me any harm; you did not understand."

"I did." She was honest. "But it was no good, if that is any consolation to you. She would not believe me. She told me I was a liar to my face. I think she would have struck me with her riding-whip, but I got out of the way. Mr. Tremayne—why are you so unkind to her? She cares so much for you!"

He laughed harshly at that. "Not at all, my dear lady," he said. "Don't have that on your conscience. She cares nothing for me."

"How like a man! Are you quite blind? I tell you she adores you and any one but yourself could see it. But you are so jealous, and so cross with her that she is frightened to death of you. Do you know she carries a letter of yours about always with her? Yes, she does, because I have seen it.

She even had it with her when we were in that wretched Arab hut. And I know your writing. And she writes to you, too, but I don't suppose she gives, or sends you, the letters. I have gone unexpectedly into her room and seen them. I'm a cat, but that's all true, and I'm telling you now so that you can make it up before it is too late."

Tremayne did not speak. He was thinking how he had sneered at Iris for the letter she carried about, and the letters she wrote and never sent. Was it true that they were to him? Was Olive Maddison speaking the truth?

He looked at her, and saw how white and tired she was. "You have talked too much," he said, alarmed, and just then the door opened and Mrs. Briggs looked in to say that the doctor and nurse had arrived.

"I will come down at once," said Tremayne, and added: "Good-bye for the present," to the woman who held on to his coat.

She said "Good-bye," and he pressed the cold hand. "Come and see me to-morrow, won't you, and say you forgive me?"

"I forgive you freely," he returned, "and I hope you will sleep now and worry no more about us."

He went quietly out and closed the door. That night she died.

* * * * *

It was nearly four o'clock before the doctors, the nurses, and the husband had finished with Tremayne, and he was at liberty to seek Iris, and think about his own affairs.

He did not worry himself very greatly about what Mrs. Maddison had said; he believed that it would be easy enough to make Iris understand if he made, as he was ready to do, a frank apology for the blame he had cast upon her for her share in the night adventure.

There was so little in his old love affair with Molly Hammond. He had been a young fool, that was the

way he looked back and regarded it now, and she had been a jolly girl, full of humour and as good-natured as she had been immoral. The uncomfortable part was the remembrance of the way in which he had treated Cassillis, recollecting how young and ignorant the latter had been.

He ran up the stairs and knocked on Iris's door. There was no answer, and he opened it and looked in. There was no one there, and supposing that she had gone out he went down again and into the street.

He wondered if she had gone to the Count's garden. He did not like the idea of her being out alone anyway, and hoped she had not gone far; but that was her favourite place, and she might have gone there to think things over.

It was rather a nice spot for a reconciliation, he thought. If Mrs. Maddison had spoken the truth, and if deep down in her heart Iris did care for him, even a little, then perhaps if he went and found her there, amid its green and peaceful ways, she might find it in her heart to be kinder to him. He would ask her at least to be friends; though he recollected with a little self-reproach how only a few days ago she had asked him to be friends, and he had sternly refused, saying he was not a friend, and did not wish to be.

He wondered if he had been too stern, but the honour of the Tremaynes had to be satisfied at any cost. Iris had sinned against him, and against society, and the irreproachable name of Tremayne, and she had to pay. She was a woman, and women ought not to sin.

Thus he came to the garden, and rapped upon the door. It was opened by the same young Arab, with the rose and the cigarette.

He shook his head at the question. "No," he said in French. "Madame has not been here to-day. Madame is well known to me, and should Madame come I will tell her Monsieur seeks for her."

Tremayne thanked him and turned away wondering where she could have gone. As he walked slowly back he began somehow to feel a little uneasy, for it was not like Iris to go out alone, and even if she were with one of the other men—he was still uneasy after the last experience.

As he entered the courtyard again, however, he saw the three men playing bridge there, which disproved any chance of that.

He went across to them direct. "Have any of you seen my wife?" he asked. They had not seen her since luncheon, and looked surprised at the question. Her room was still empty.

Tremayne ordered tea, and drank it when it came; then he called for a whisky and soda, and drank that, too, while the time crept on—six o'clock—half-past six.

It was quite dark now, and still Iris did not come in. He was really very uneasy, for to be out in Biskra after dark meant untold and many dangers to a young and pretty English woman. He was convinced that she was not out anywhere of her own free will, for Iris was naturally nervous, and did not care about going out alone, or even with a guide.

He went up to her room for the third time. It occurred to him that if they had to make a search for her, he had better know what she was wearing, and manlike, now he had to think, he could not recollect to save his life what she had had on when last he saw her.

But he remembered that she generally wore a large brown straw hat with a veil over it, and he switched on the light to see if it were lying about.

It was then, as he looked, that he missed the most familiar object in the room, her leather dressing-case. It was gone from the table on which it usually stood, and like a flash he knew the truth. She had carried

out her threat and taken the law into her own hands at last. She had left him.

He went back and shut the door carefully. Then he looked round. Her hat was gone and her big steamer coat. Her light dress was flung over the bed as if she had changed hurriedly, and there was obvious evidence, now he came to look for it, of hurried packing.

All her toilet things were gone, her writing-case—but there was no letter of explanation. Yes, what was that on the table? It was—or had been a letter, but it was torn into a hundred tiny pieces. Just a few scraps of paper, but the writing on them was his own, and he knew Mrs. Maddison had spoken the truth!

He sat there in silence for a long time, thinking things over and asking himself where lay the blame, and why she had never told him about the letter; but he did not ask himself if he should follow her. That went without saying.

He went down to dinner, vouchsafing no information to the rest of the party as to what he knew. Afterwards he went to the station, but it was closed for the night and he could not send a wire to the hotel at Algiers to stop her if she arrived there in the morning. It was late when he got back, and he went to his room and told his manservant that Mrs. Tremayne had gone on to Algiers, and they were going to follow to-morrow. March appeared surprised, but that did not matter. It saved explanations, and the man merely said "Yes, sir," like a good servant, and offered to pack the remainder of Madam's clothes with the chambermaid's assistance, which Tremayne was glad to let him do.

Sleep was impossible. Tremayne knew that Iris was in the train on her way to Algiers, and alone, and he worried himself nearly distracted, longing for the daylight to come.

But when it came it brought no solace, for his

journey was delayed by the news that Mrs. Maddison had died in the night.

* * * * *

It was only thanks to the English doctor who took charge of everything, including the nearly demented husband, and volunteered to get them all back to Algiers, that Tremayne was able to get away the following day. There had been very considerable comment in the hotel about Iris's abrupt departure, and no one believed anything but that she had run away and left her husband, and none of the men, to tell the truth, blamed her. But Tremayne gave no information except that she was waiting for him in Algiers, and that he had thought it better for her to go on.

It was with the greatest relief that he quitted Biskra and found himself, with March, in the train at last. He had wired to Algiers, but there had been no reply. The worry, together with the sudden and tragic end of the woman who had conceived such an extraordinary infatuation for him, was beginning to tell on him.

In Algiers there was nothing but disappointment. Iris was not at the St. George Hotel; his telegram was there unopened; and all the bland and smiling manageress could tell him was that Dr. Rutherford had brought her up a note from Mrs. Tremayne, to authorize her to deliver the latter's trunks into his care; as far as she knew, the doctor and Mrs. Tremayne had sailed for Marseilles two or three days ago.

He went down to his bank, the Credit Foncier Agricole, and found Iris's letter waiting there for him; at the hotel was Rutherford's telegram returned from Biskra, and that evening came another from Marseilles. They were all equally disappointing, and Iris's letter made him uneasy again. Of course he did not believe her. He knew perfectly well that he could compel her to return to him, and he would do

so, but he wished that it had not all happened. It was upsetting, and he was uneasily conscious that this time he had gone too far with Iris, and that it would be difficult to patch things up.

* * * * *

And so back to London. He did not hurry his journey now that he knew Iris was safe, and in Rutherford's care. She could wait and think things over, and he hoped that he would find her thoroughly repentant and in a reasonable frame of mind. She had enough money, and he did not think it would hurt her to be on her own for a few days.

He said as much to Rutherford when, the morning after his arrival, and back at his old rooms at the Hotel Cimric, he went round to see the doctor.

It was a fine March morning and he thought how very nice it was to be in London again. His rooms were so comfortable after the foreign hotels; his own car was a joy to him, and the thought of meeting Iris again quickened his pulses. He wondered what their meeting would bring forth; whether it was too late for them to start again, and if all Mrs. Maddison had said was true.

Rutherford was expecting him, and they spent a good half-hour together while the doctor told him all that had happened, and Tremayne did the same. He did not say anything about Iris, except to thank him for all he had done.

"I hope I shall find my wife in a reasonable frame of mind," he said, "and we shall have no more nonsense. I hope also that you will come to Trelawn later in the year and stay with us."

His every suspicion was at rest. He saw, quite as plainly as Iris had done, that though Rutherford had enjoyed the friendship in Algeria, and had been pleased to be somewhat attentive to a pretty little neglected wife, he was the merest friend, and had not one tender thought for Iris.

"Yes, I will come with pleasure," he replied. "And now go along and find your pretty wife. I feel sure she will be all right now, and ready to return to you."

Tremayne needed no second telling. The sun shone—the car flew, and they were at the Queen Anne Hotel at half-past ten.

"Mrs. Tremayne?" said the young lady in the office. "Sorry! Mrs. Tremayne left this morning."

"What?"

"Left this morning about an hour ago. No, I don't know where she went. The porter might know what address she gave."

The porter did not know. "Left in a taxi," he said. "I saw her off, but couldn't say the number of the cab though. Didn't look, to tell you the truth, sir; I whistled a passing one. I didn't hear what address. She told the man herself. I think it was Victoria, but I am not sure, sir."

They called the manager and he came, like Madame Brut in Algiers, bland and smiling, but knew nothing.

"I have no idea where she went. We are rather full just now and do not take much notice. She just said she was leaving. Some baggage came for her last evening, so the porter says, and she took it with her in the taxi this morning."

Tremayne nodded, and had nothing to say. He rang up Rutherford, but the doctor knew nothing.

"She was perfectly well and calm yesterday morning," he answered. "And I understood her to say she would wait in this morning to see you."

"She has been fooling both of us," retorted Tremayne and slammed down the receiver. He left his address at the Queen Anne Hotel, and went back to the Cimric.

Now at last he realized that Iris had won this round. She had tricked him—used Rutherford to

bring her home, and made of him a cover under which the better to escape. The desert had taken her once, and given her up. But London had taken her now, and there was no clue.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IRIS had never been to a theatre alone in her life, and never inside The Star or its sister theatres of musical comedy.

Neither had she ever had anything to do with any members of the theatrical profession. It had been news to her when Tremayne had told her at Algiers that letters addressed to Cassillis at the Star Theatre, or to Calvey's Company, would always find him. He never thought such information might come in useful, but so it was. Iris wrote a letter after she had seen Rutherford leave the Queen Anne Hotel.

"Dear Julian," she wrote, "I have left Geoffrey, and I am staying alone in town ; he is still abroad. I want to be independent, and the only thing I can think is any good to me is the stage. Can you, and will you help me ? At least, will you see me and give me your advice for old time's sake ? I do not think you can bear me any grudge. You need not—and I have absolutely no one else to go to now, no one to whom I could talk frankly and who would understand. You will, when I tell you that Geoffrey has never forgiven me. Please let me see you.

"IRIS TREMAYNE."

She took this to the theatre herself and gave it into the hands of a very obliging man in uniform, who (looking at the lady's sable coat and jewelled chain) said he would certainly see that it reached Mr.

Cassillis in the first interval, and if she would take a seat any answer would be brought to her.

Iris took a stall, and went to it, but it must be confessed that she did not enjoy the performance. She was not, and never had been, stage-struck, though she recognized that "her face would be her fortune" were she to go on the "boards." She had so much difficulty in recognizing in the actor the boy she had known so well, that she wished she had never written the note, and regretted her impulse many times before the show ended.

Then, in the second interval, the attendant brought her an answer, and with trembling fingers she broke open the envelope.

"Dear Iris," he had written, "Please wait for me at the entrance. I will come round to you as soon as I possibly can, and of course I will help.

"JULIAN CASSILLIS."

She folded it up, and waited.

She saw the play to the end, and went down to the foyer, where she seated herself and tried to pretend that nobody looked at her and that she was not a bit nervous.

It was a Wednesday matinée, and when the last of the audience had melted away, the box-office was still open, with people coming in and out, so that she was not alone; but the time seemed long, and many times she nearly got up and ran away. If it had not been for the knowledge that Tremayne arrived in London that night, and that the next morning it would be too late, she would have done so, but this time she was determined that she would not be taken back to Trelawn and scolded like a naughty child. Cassillis himself had actually done what she wanted to do. He had made a bid for freedom and independence, and had won it. Why should she not do the same?

"Hullo—here you are!" said a voice.

For a second or two Iris did not speak, for she really did not recognize again the transition from the actor in fancy dress to the good-looking young man in the neat dark overcoat, with the soft hat and brogue shoes. He did not look an actor at all, and she ran her eye over him half-alarmed and wholly bewildered.

"I don't believe you recognize me after all," he said with a laugh. Then she did, for the voice was beyond all doubt.

"Oh, Julian, of course," she answered. "How stupid I am, for you have not really changed a bit. And how awfully nice of you to come round like this."

They shook hands, and there was something more than pleasure in their eyes as they looked once more at each other, and the veil of the past rolled up.

"Where shall we go?" she asked. "We can't talk here, and I have so much to say to you. But have you time to listen—aren't you busy?"

"No, not until to-night; come and have some tea, will you? You have changed, Iris. I believe you have actually grown! We'll go to a nice quiet place I know of, and have some tea while we talk. I don't get much lunch on matinée days, so I'm hungry. This way, I have my car here."

"Your car!"

"Well it's mine for use, anyhow."

Much to her relief he did not ask after Tremayne, and they went out to the little car waiting in the side street near the stage-door.

Iris looked round with interest, which he noticed.

"I didn't ask you to come round to the back," he said. "They are such a crew, and you were alone. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't think I should have dared to come, anyway," she replied, "so I'm glad you didn't. What a jolly little car; I haven't seen mine for over four months. We have been abroad all the winter."

"Lucky people! Where?"

Iris told him, touching lightly on Algeria and

Biskra. "I left Geoffrey in Biskra," she said carelessly, "and came home with a doctor we knew. We got home on Saturday."

"Tremayne still there?"

"He is in Paris now, I believe."

They drove out West. Iris did not talk much, and he was never a good conversationalist—but once she said with a sigh: "I am so glad to see you again, Julian, I can't tell you how glad; I believe I could cry with pleasure"; and he had answered quickly in alarm: "For goodness' sake don't. It would upset me most frightfully if you did—in fact I should probably cry too, and then I should not be able to drive straight!" at which she laughed instead.

They stopped at a French teashop that Iris had never seen or heard of. It was dainty and quiet, and the pretty French waitress knew Cassillis and found them a corner away by themselves.

"Cakes, of course," he said, ordering tea, "things with cream and ice and chocolate—those are the things you used to like, aren't they? I hope you have not changed."

"Not a bit; fancy you remembering all this time. Shall I take off my coat—it's warm, and we need not hurry, need we?"

He took it off for her, and she noticed his beautifully kept hands and nice clothes. They looked across the little table at each other and remembered, and admired.

"Oh, Julian, I am so glad to see you again," she said.

"And I to see you. I can't tell you what I felt when I got your note. I didn't think you even knew where I was. What made you write to me?"

She told him how she had found out his address, and why she had risked it and written to him. "But I didn't know whether you would see me after the way Geoffrey had treated you."

"Oh, I think you must have known that, for we had

no quarrel—you and I, but I never thought Tremayne would have let me see you again."

"Perhaps he wouldn't, but it doesn't matter now, as I'm not going back to him. No, I'm not really. I won't. I am going to get some work to do. I have a little money, but it won't last long; that's why I thought of the stage. I don't know what else I can do, but I have been told I am still pretty. Dr. Rutherford told me so and I think he is rather a connoisseur, so perhaps that would be worth something on the stage. What do you say?"

"Of course you are frightfully pretty," he returned frankly. "Your face would be worth a fortune to a man like Calvey, that and your story, but——"

The tea came, and while she poured it out he lit a cigarette for himself and another for her. She remarked on his evident prosperity, and he smiled.

"Oh yes, I am prosperous enough. I have been lucky and done well. But it's hard work, too, you know."

"I don't mind that. I would do anything, anything to be free and independent—not to have to take Geoffrey's money—to do as I please. Julian—he has been very unjust."

"I am surprised to hear that, but have a cake first—that one looks good—then you can go on. Do you remember that teashop in Hendley?"

"Rather! and how we used to creep in and sit at the back——"

"And Langley came in and caught us——"

"And I got some cream on my dress, and grandma was so mystified as to where it came from——"

"And Langley nearly told old Barton——"

They were like children again for a few minutes, full of pleasant reminiscences over the tea and cakes, and thoroughly enjoying themselves. Then Iris remembered her troubles and sobered.

"You will help me, Julian, won't you?" she begged. "You always wanted to go on the stage, and you got free and went——"

"Had to!"

"It's the same thing; help me to get away, Julian, do; and for goodness' sake don't tell me, like Dr. Rutherford did, to be a good little girl and make it up, because I won't. I have borne all I can, and nothing will make me go back to it."

"Well, I shall not try, so don't worry—and I don't know where Tremayne is, either."

"Perhaps you would go to him, or write, if I tell you——"

"I don't think I am at all likely to do that." Something in his tone made Iris look at him. She said, "No, of course not; then you will?"

"Will what? Help you to go on the stage? My dear Iris, you would loathe the stage. You have no conception what it would be to a girl like you. Still, if you really want to—— But look here, you must tell me what it is all about; why have you left Mr. Tremayne like this? I simply couldn't do anything to help you unless I know. I wouldn't introduce you to Calvey, or—or anything like that. It wouldn't be playing the game, because, of course, you know how Tremayne loathes the stage and everything connected with it."

"Yes, I know." She stirred her tea in silence, then—
"I will tell you, Julian. I can't tell any one else—they wouldn't understand. I meant to tell Dr. Rutherford on my way home with him, but when he began to lecture me I felt I couldn't. He would only have thought me wicked——"

"Wicked!"

"Well, Geoffrey did. He said he thanked God that my father and grandmother were dead so that I could not break their hearts, and that has been his attitude ever since. But you understand—you don't think me wicked——?"

"Well, hardly." He put out his hand and covered hers. "I'm sorry—you have had a rotten time—worse than I ever thought. I believed he had forgiven you

entirely once he had finished with me, and that would be the end of it as far as you were concerned. I'm sorry, Iris ! ”

“ It can't be helped—it was my fault, too. I ought never to have married him, Julian. You told me not to at Grindelwald, but I would do it.”

“ Still, looking back now, we both know that you could not have married me. I was a fool to think that you could. Everything has gone wrong for you and me, hasn't it ? ”

She nodded. “ And we might have been so happy and had a good time together, and been pals, as we were until Geoffrey prevented it. It takes a lot of forgiving just to think that he could not let us even be friends, and when I think about the way he treated you I feel I can't forgive him ; I've told him that, and now I am with you again—and see how nice you are—” she laughed, though it was half-way to tears—“ it seems too horrible——”

Cassillis's face changed, and for a second quivered. “ Don't let's talk about that, it's over and done with. And I dare say, according to his creed, I deserved all I got. Tell me what has happened to make you leave him like this ? ”

Iris told him. This time she did not hesitate, and it did not seem small and silly. They sat in the corner of the warm teashop in the dusk of the March evening while she told him about the Maddisons and Rutherford—about Biskra and the desert. She did not spare herself, and she did not condemn Tremayne.

“ I came away because I could bear no more,” she said. “ He agreed to have a separation, so he can say nothing, but I could not stay any longer in the hotel to be called a ‘ poor little fool ! ’ If he had not been so hard on you and myself it would have been different.”

“ But you don't believe what that woman told you ? ” asked Cassillis. “ It's rubbish.”

“ Not altogether, Julian ; there was something in it.

I don't say it was true, but Geoffrey has got sick of me, there's no doubt about it. I think he hates me."

"Oh, Iris, what rot! I expect you have led him a pretty dance. But, you know, women like this Mrs. Maddison must be rotten women; they say anything and don't stop at lies; I know. Anyhow, what do you want me to do? Command me, and I'll do anything I can."

Iris clasped her hands together. "You are a dear! Find me a place to live in first, where he won't find me." She told him where she was now staying. Cassillis remembered the hotel, because it was there that Tremayne had taken him to call upon Mrs. Stapleton when he had first come to London, seven years ago.

He said "Oh Lord!" and lit another cigarette.

"I must leave the first thing to-morrow morning, so I want to find a place to-night. Geoffrey arrives at eleven o'clock to-night, and he will be round by ten to-morrow. I must be gone by then. You must know some place, Julian."

"Lots, but they wouldn't do for you."

"Where do you live?"

"In a flat, near Baker Street. I have not got a spare room or I would hide you."

They both laughed at the idea.

"I'd come," she said, "but you must know of some rooms, and then I must get some work. I don't care if I go into a shop, but——"

"Oh, by Jove, I've got an idea!" he interrupted her, "I know a place where they would take you gladly. It's not far from my flat either. It's a sort of boarding-house, but they are nice women who keep it; they are two maiden ladies, and they don't take men, so you will be quite safe there. Your speaking of a shop brought it into my mind; there is a girl who lives there and she works in a shop."

"That's just it," cried Iris excitedly. "Where is it, and are you sure they will take me?"

"Delighted, I should think. They are not full, so many companies are out on tour, and they are a little bit too particular for the profession; they don't like supper parties and rows. We will go round, if you like, and see them—and the girl I know——"

"A nice girl you know?" Iris was full of interest at once. "Tell me about her."

"I think you will like her; she always reminded me of you, and she is your sort. She works, but as you are going to work yourself, you won't mind mixing with working girls."

"I shall love it," replied Iris simply, "I'm just sick of my own sort—women like Mrs. Maddison, with lots of money and a spiteful tongue. Yes, let's go round now, do."

* * * * *

It is not everybody who knows Wilbraham Road. It is quite a nice road, tucked away by Regent's Park; there are trees in it, and the houses at the end overlook a corner of the park itself, which is an excellent advertisement for the "apartments" and "board-residences" which constitute most of the houses. The Miss Deanes had the end house, and it was quite a nice one, spotlessly clean, though the furniture was old-fashioned and the carpets were patched and faded.

"Not a member of *the* profession surely," remarked Miss Deane, eyeing the sable coat as Cassillis introduced them, and everything was arranged.

"Not yet," said Iris, smiling at Cassillis.

The Miss Deanes smiled at him, too; he was evidently in favour here as everywhere, and it seemed that they had known him a long time. They promised to look after Iris and give her their best room. "And tell Sylvia," he said when they were leaving. "Ask her if she can wait in to-morrow morning until we come. I want to introduce her to Mrs. Tremayne."

"Yes," said Iris rather nervously, "I must get away early."

They drove back to the Queen Anne Hotel in Cassillis's car, both of them silent again.

"I think you will be all right there," he assured her as they said good-bye. "I will come round and fetch you at nine-thirty——"

"No, you must not do that, or Geoffrey will find out. Every one knows you, you see, so I shall say I am going to some station, and trust that the man won't remember, because I am afraid that Geoffrey may search for me. Julian—you will come every day and see me, won't you?"

"Every day, of course, and we will have a ripping time." He laughed, and they shook hands. "And Tremayne will have time to think!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

JULIAN CASSILLIS would not have been human if he had not felt a glow of triumph that night, when he knew that Geoffrey Tremayne was in London, and had probably spent the day in searching fruitlessly for his wife, while she was safe in his charge, and had come voluntarily to him for help and protection.

It had once been Tremayne's day, and once the honours had been even, but now it was Julian's turn !

Yet Cassillis did not look at all triumphant over it as he ate his solitary dinner before he went to the theatre. He had met Iris at Miss Deane's house that morning, and had seen her safely installed into her new life. They had made her very welcome, and he had introduced her to Miss Carvel, who had been known on the stage as Sylvia Denise, and who ought at that hour to have been serving in the lingerie shop in Bond Street which was so much more to her taste than playing leading lady at The Star.

Afterwards, when she had gone, Iris said to him : " Julian, isn't she lovely ! I have never seen a prettier girl."

" She isn't as pretty as you," he had answered, " but she is pretty, and a jolly nice girl too. She has a gorgeous voice and was on the stage, where I met her. We used to play together ; I hope you will like her ; she would be a good friend to you."

" I love her already," returned Iris, " I love everything."

She was enthusiastic and full of excitement at the

novelty of her adventure. In the midst of it, settling into her new quarters with the joy of her renewed friendship with Cassillis, and the friendship with Sylvia Carvel, she forgot to think about her husband.

* * * * *

And thereafter, for many days, Iris forgot.

The days lengthened and the spring came at last. London parks grew gay with flowers, the winds softened and the sun shone. "Eldorado" was played every night at the Star Theatre, and twice a week at a *matinée*—the rest of the time Julian Cassillis spent with Iris.

They were like brother and sister, to be just to them, and perfectly happy; while between Iris and Sylvia Carvel grew up a delightful friendship which they both remembered all their lives.

Sylvia, like Julian, was an irresponsible child of nature and an artist to her finger-tips. She was the penniless daughter of an Irishman and a French woman, was convent educated, and had been thrown on the world at seventeen. Iris never knew exactly how she had earned her living in Paris until she had been "discovered," and had come over to England to play leading lady at The Star, from which, after three years of success, she had retired to earn thirty shillings a week at a Bond Street shop!

"I hate the stage," she would say. "Oh yes, I can sing, and I can dance, and I am pretty. Oh yes, but I hated it!"

"You will hate it, too," said Cassillis, "so just think it over well before you sign any contract. Sylvia's contract has not expired yet."

"My contract will never expire," said Sylvia quietly, and Iris did not understand.

"You would rather serve in a shop and waste all your talents?" she said.

"I would rather be free," and again Iris did not understand.

"But you are happy," she said to Cassillis, "and look how prosperous you are! You like it?"

"Do I?" He smiled at Sylvia.

"He doesn't," said that person, "he hates it just as much as I do. That's why we were friends, isn't it, Julian? We used to try so hard to pretend that we liked it, and all the time we were just hating it. But he is a man, and free to do what he likes."

"Free, perhaps, but not my own master," he returned.

"You are not a chattel of Valentine Calvey's—dependent on a contract, and anyway your contract is up in June, isn't it?"

"What are you going to do then?" asked Iris, rather alarmed and wondering what would become of her if he left town. But he had not made up his mind. It seemed that he had had some very good offers to do real opera, but was afraid that he was not strong enough. He did not look robust, and Iris had noticed more than once how thin he was, and how tired he seemed when he had to play two performances in one day. Yet he did little else outside the theatre, and lived an extraordinarily simple life. "That is just at present, while society is out of town," he said with a little laugh. "Later on in the season I shall have plenty of entertainment, no doubt."

But as it was, Iris saw him nearly every day. He made a great many vague promises to introduce her to Calvey, and see about getting her on at The Star, but they never matured, and he never meant them to. But she found plenty to do nevertheless, and was never bored now. Sylvia was an accomplished dressmaker, and Iris, who was always clever in that way herself since her girlhood's days when it had been a necessity, now found great joy in helping her friend, as well as remodelling her own wardrobe. There was plenty of work in the house, too, helping the cheery little Miss Deanes; cakes to make, flowers to arrange,

and rooms to dust, while on every available occasion Cassillis came and took her out.

On Sundays, when it was fine, they went out for the day, with Sylvia as chaperone. They drove in Julian's car to Dorking, and climbed Box-hill; to Hindhead, and up the river. As the days grew longer they liked the river best, for it reminded them of Hendley.

And at other times Iris would get Julian to sing when he was not too tired, in Miss Deane's drawing-room, where of necessity there was an exceptionally good piano. Sometimes he and Sylvia would sing together; they had both played on tour in "Fancy Fair" for some months, and had sung pretty duets, but they liked the old ballads best because Sylvia hated the stage, and Julian was never anxious to talk about it when he was out of the theatre, which was astonishing for an actor.

She could have listened to them for hours. She loved Sylvia's slave song:—

"There's a wild wind o'er the heather, and it's blowing from the sea——"

and the duet:—

"I did not know when first we met, if you could ever care for me——"

and which ended for him:—

"But I always meant to make you my own!"

But, best of all, she loved to hear them singing:—

"Oh, that we two were maying——"

"How I wish you two could sing that in the music-room at Trelawn," she exclaimed one evening, when they had sung her almost into tears. "Julian, your voice is like gold, and yours, Sylvia, is like silver bells; but this room is so full of stuff; you want space, and no curtains."

Cassillis laughed with his faint bitter irony. "We don't possess music-rooms, do we Sylvia? And I am afraid we shall never arrive at Trelawn. We belong to something different!"

"Nothing so good ever came out of Trelawn," flashed Iris rather angrily.

"Ever been called 'good,' Sylvia?" he jeered. "We're the legion of the lost! What?"

"The 'cohort of the damned,'" added Sylvia with a gay laugh. "Beyond the palers!"

It was a nice life, and Iris never wished it to end; she did not think, when she looked back, that she had ever been so happy before. Sylvia was always happy; she had a young French brother who lived near; a young "rapscallion" to whom she was devoted, and then there were two or three other young women living in the same house, playing at the theatres and in orchestras, nice, cheery girls, though not of the class that Sylvia was.

Tremayne's name was scarcely ever mentioned between Iris and Julian. Oddly enough, whereas Rutherford had always talked of Tremayne and praised him, and urged her to make it up—Cassillis, after the first day, never mentioned the matter except in a casual way. Evidently, thought Iris, he was wise enough to see that her mind was made up, and also that she was quite right. Perhaps he also wanted to get a little of his own back on Tremayne, at which she would not have been surprised. Anyway, whatever the reason, he had not attempted to see or communicate with Tremayne to let him know where she was, and after the first month she felt perfectly safe.

If all London had been searched, they had not come this way, and were not likely to do so now. At first she had avoided all the places where there was a chance of seeing him, or of being seen. She dressed simply, avoided the sable coat except when she was driving, and only walked in Regent's Park.

Sometimes she went to The Star, but she did not

like Julian on the stage, and did not care at all for Leila Hurst, the girl who was playing with him.

"Oh, she's not a bad sort," he said carelessly one day when she remarked upon her; "she was at the Princes' Theatre, and she dances better than Sylvia did. I don't think you would like her though, and she isn't any good. I should not like you to know her. Lennox—Lord Lennox, you know, keeps her."

"How absolutely disgusting," said Iris vehemently; "are they all like that?"

"Most of 'em. Does the stage still appeal to you?"

"It would not be necessary to do that sort of thing, surely?"

"I am afraid you would find it so if you wanted to get on; you would be very unpopular if you kept out of everything; and of course it pays these girls to be well dressed and to live well. Leila has a ripping little flat, and he is awfully good to her."

Iris sniffed a little. "Which he pays for, and so does she! No thank you. Mrs. Maddison used to speak of Lord Lennox—she knew him. She once mentioned him to Geoffrey, and he promptly called him a rake, and said I wasn't to meet him—is he?"

"We are all rakes to men like your husband. He is a very charming man and I expect you would adore him; most women do, I believe. Leila knows Lady Hammond, too."

"Does she?" Iris longed with true feminine curiosity to ask him about Lady Hammond, and had wanted to all along, but did not like to trespass. It seemed so utterly impossible now that she had met Julian again, but—"You know her, don't you?" she asked, without looking at him.

"Yes,"—he did not volunteer any information—"Why?"

"Did you ever meet Mrs. Maddison, I wonder?"

"I don't remember her name, but I may have done"

so. I have met so many people at the Hammonds' house that I don't remember half of them."

"I think you would remember her. She has cat's eyes, and if you had seen her look at Geoffrey——" She broke off, for that was one point on which she did not dare trust herself to talk; but Cassillis laughed.

"Oh rot," he returned, "I don't believe Tremayne ever looked at any woman but you in all the world. Why should he?"

"Men get tired, Julian."

"They don't get tired of such as you; it's the other sort they get tired of. But don't let's talk about it. Have another cake!"

She had to laugh. "You have never really grown up," she told him. "You are still a boy, and a very dear boy! Julian, what a lovely time we might all of us have had, if——"

And he knew without telling what she meant.

They were having tea at Miss Deane's house after a theatre on a Saturday afternoon. Sylvia had not come in and they were alone.

"Sylvia wants me to come and join her at her shop," said Iris, "instead of The Star with you. I should rather like it. Which do you advise, Julian?"

"The shop," he answered unhesitatingly. "You would be safe there, even if you didn't make much money; it's only a temporary thing after all, and I will see that you don't go short of anything."

"But why only temporary? I shall have to earn my own living. I have very nearly finished all my money, and then——"

"Oh, well—there is time to talk about that; I am afraid I must go now, having my living to get, and I must have a bath! It's Sunday to-morrow, where shall we go? It looks like being a lovely day, and I may have to go out of town next week-end."

"It will be horrid without you. Let's go on the river then, and enjoy ourselves—if you want to come." She always added that, and he never answered her; it was so obvious.

There was silence for a minute, and then Iris left the room. Sylvia caught the last words as she came in. "You don't want me to-morrow, do you, Julian?" she asked, "you would rather be alone? Isn't she a darling! I can't think what manner of man he can be who quarrels with Iris. Julian—how will you part with her when the time comes?"

"Well, I have got to." He took some more tea. "I have always known it. Whatever she is to me, she is another man's wife now, and even if he isn't nice to her according to our lights, it's up to him to do what he thinks is right. He is different from us, and Iris belongs to him; besides, in time she would get tired of our Bohemian way of living."

Sylvia nodded, but she sighed, too. "I think she is awfully fond of you, Julian. You know what I mean—I think she cares for you."

"No, she doesn't," he swung round half-angrily, "and she hasn't got to. It's all very well for me to bring her here to you, and for me to take care of her with you; we can do it, even if you take her into your shop and let her work. But I am going to give her back to Tremayne when the time is ripe. You know I am, and if she got fond of me in that way—I couldn't."

Sylvia nodded again, and her beautiful eyes clouded. "Poor Julian! I know. You have had a rough time."

Julian gave rather a wretched laugh, and rested his head on his hands.

"I wonder you don't take what the gods offer——"

"Do you?" He looked at her. "You won't some day; you will find a man who will worship you as I worship Iris, and then you'll understand when you

ask yourself if you shall tell, and face the music, or 'take what the gods offer.' I couldn't make Iris happy either. She belongs to Tremayne, and I shall give her back to him."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IT was a wonderful May day, and the river was at its best. Iris thought that she had never seen anything more beautiful than the Thames Valley in its spring green, with the primroses in the hedges and the bluebells in the woods.

They had driven as far as Windsor, and then taken a punt and drifted lazily down to Runnymede, lunching in the shade of the trees.

Iris was full of content. Tremayne and Trelawn seemed miles and miles away, and everything had happened so long ago. All that mattered was the shining river, the warm sun, and this extremely lovable young man who lay in the bottom of the punt, smoking endless cigarettes, while between his half-shut eyes he watched her happy face, her golden hair, her white throat and the joyous youth in every line of her figure.

What a fool Tremayne had been, he thought. Oh, what a fool!

He had not always thought so. Once he had looked upon him as a much wronged man, but now in the light of worldly experience he had come to the conclusion that "possession" is a very valuable thing, and one not to be lightly thrown away.

Iris was thinking on the same lines, but in another direction, and quite suddenly she said: "Julian, will you marry Sylvia some day, do you think? I wonder you don't. She is so pretty, and your temperaments are so much alike."

"Too much alike," he replied with a smile, "we should not make a success of it. And Sylvia is not

that sort either ; she wouldn't marry me if I asked her—and I don't want to ask her. I think the reason of our friendship is just because there has never been anything like that between us. I have just been a 'pal' to her ever since she left the stage, and she hates men, you know—as men."

"I am sure she doesn't hate you. Some men are horrid—but you aren't. You're awfully nice."

He ignored the compliment. "You have not been on the stage or you would understand. I don't think Sylvia will ever marry, and as for me—I am much too much in love somewhere else, thank you!"

Iris thought of Lady Hammond at once. "Oh, what is she like, do tell me?" she asked naïvely. "Nice?"

"Very."

"Pretty?"

"Awfully."

"Young? She isn't very young, is she?"

He threw back his head with a hearty laugh. "An absolute baby!" He dropped the end of his cigarette in the river—it sank with a fizzle. "The river is beautifully clear. Look over and answer your questions—then you'll see her, you see—"

Iris stared at him a moment, puzzled, for after all these weeks of camaraderie this was not like Julian. "I wasn't joking," she said rather reproachfully.

He looked back at her. "Neither was I."

"Then how could you say such a silly thing? Here am I trying to make a match between you and the prettiest girl in London, and you go and say silly things like that. I thought we had finished with all that rubbish years ago."

He did not answer.

"Julian."

"Well?"

"What did you mean?"

He had to laugh. "How like a woman! You say I am not to talk rubbish, and then in the

same breath you ask me what I mean. Well—don't talk about my marrying Sylvia or any other woman, please, that's all. And now that we are being thoroughly horrid I have something else to say ; it's a good opportunity as you can't run away—" he sat up abruptly. Iris promptly edged away, but there was not much room in the punt.

"Are you really going to work in Sylvia's shop?"

She looked relieved. "Yes, I must, Julian. I have not enough money to go on any longer like this, and I don't believe after all that I can face the stage ; you have set me right against it, you and Sylvia."

"I hope so, I have tried to. I would a thousand times rather see you in a shop. And to be quite frank, I never meant to help you to go on the stage at all. I did mean to at first, as I thought it would be rather great to have you at The Star, and to see Tremayne's face when he found it out ! Besides, I hadn't seen you for two years, and I didn't know you ; but I do now, and it can't be done."

She did not argue it.

"You would hate the men messing you about, even on the stage," he went on.

"Yes, I should, but I should not mind you."

"But it would not be me ; if I took you to Calvey and he gave you a contract, he would send you on tour for the first year—he always does. I had to go."

"Sylvia told me she never toured until her last six months."

"That's different, and she hasn't told you why. You would have to, so don't, in any case, go on the stage, Iris ; if you must work, go with Sylvia to her shop."

He hesitated. "There's something else. Oh, damn ! I hate talking seriously, but it's got to be done, so let's get it over. You know what you told me about Tremayne, and once or twice you have come back to the same thing, about this Mrs. Maddison ? I don't believe a word of it myself, but you seem to.

You really think he is tired of you, and wants to get rid of you, do you ? ”

Iris hesitated. “ He said he would arrange for us to have a separation ; that was before Dr. Rutherford tried to reconcile us, but even so, he must have wanted it. I never thought when I suggested it that he would agree so readily, and so it must have been true.”

“ Well, leave it at that,” he replied hastily. “ A separation is no good if Tremayne wanted to marry again, or if you did. Now supposing that he finds out, as inevitably he must, where you are, and where you have been, and turns nasty about it and won’t take you back, what then ? ”

“ But I don’t want him to take me back ! ” indignantly. “ I’m not going back.”

“ Very well, suppose he objects to me and wants to divorce you ? ”

She flushed up. “ Don’t be silly. How and why should he ? I have done nothing wrong.”

“ If he wanted to get rid of you it would be a good opportunity, and I daresay if he tried he could rake up some evidence somewhere.”

“ But, Julian, how absurd ! ” she laughed.

“ It’s not absurd ; it’s quite possible and we must face it, Iris. Tremayne hated me——”

“ Oh, Julian, no, he loved you as if you had been his son.”

“ He hated me because of you when he knew, and he would hate me just as much again if he knew you had come to me, told me all you have, and asked my help. I know we are only friends ; we were only that at Tre-lawn, but you know what he magnified it into. Tremayne is a jealous man, and he knew you liked me. It wasn’t only the past, Iris ; if you had hated me after you married him, and never wanted to see me again, he would have felt differently about it, and that is how he may feel when he knows.”

Iris did not answer ; she knew that it was true to

some extent at least, and that Tremayne had more fear and jealousy of Cassillis than of any man living.

Cassillis leaned forward and put his hands over hers. "If that happens, Iris, and he does divorce you, will you marry me afterwards?"

The colour mounted to her face and burnt there, but she did not draw her hands away. "I should never want to marry any man again. I have not been happy enough, and have had enough of matrimony, Julian. But don't talk about it; he won't do it, and there is no evidence; why, I have never even been to your flat alone."

"I have never let you come; but he could find something, no doubt. Would you defend it if he did?"

She hesitated. "I don't know, I don't think I should; it would be so horrible."

"It would be much better not to, but to let it go through and marry me. You would be happy with me, I think; you are now."

She did not answer that; she was happy, yes, but his very words conjured up discontent and things which she did not want to think about, and which she resolutely put away at their first appearance.

"I am very fond of you, Julian," she said, after a time, "but I don't know if we should be happy, and I am sure not as happy as you and Sylvia could be. No, I don't think I should want to marry you."

"You would have to, or I would not have anything more to do with you. I mean, of course, if Tremayne did start proceedings, because of course I should be co-respondent, right or wrong."

There blew up a little chill wind, for it was after four o'clock and it was May. "It's getting cold," said Julian with a shiver, just as he had said it once before at Grindelwald. "We had better be getting back," and he got up and took up the punt pole.

Iris did not speak, and they went up stream in silence until they were nearly at the bridge.

"Oh, Julian, don't be cross with me," she begged. "It's not you I hesitate about, I'm too fond of you; let's be 'pals' again."

"Yes, but if he does, can't you see my position?"

She was suddenly tired and heartsick. "Oh, very well; if he does, I'll come to you."

"You promise you will marry me? On your honour this time!"

"If it should happen, I will, but I'm sure it never will. At least, I should never want to marry any one but you, if that's any consolation to you!"

* * * * *

It was a very silent drive back to town in the cool of the evening, and for some reason Iris felt depressed and ready to cry, and Julian was even more silent than usual.

"Where shall we feed?" he asked. "Will you come back with me, and we will have some supper at my place?"

"Sylvia isn't here to chaperone us."

"Does it matter?"

"I don't care. You have always said it did, but since you say now that it will be all the same to Geoffrey when he finds out, why should we worry? I'll come if you like."

"I should like you to come this evening, if you will; I ordered supper in case you would."

"Why didn't you ask me before? I thought you didn't want me by myself."

"It's different now."

He drove straight to his flat, a very nice one, as Iris had observed on the only occasion when she had been there with Sylvia to tea.

Cassillis did not like entertaining her there, as she had discovered, and she was surprised at his sudden invitation.

The sitting-room was all pink and grey, and there were big bowls of tulips about; one on the grand

piano, and another on the round table set with supper for two.

"Pink is your favourite colour," said Iris, bending over the tulips lovingly. "It always was. Your room is like a summer day, Julian, all pink like sunshine and grey like the shadows. It is not a bit like a bachelor's room which is generally so untidy. May I have one of your cigarettes, and—I say, who is that?"

There were a lot of photographs about; one of herself, one of Langley, and one of Sylvia in "Fancy Fair," as she had played in it with him, but this one she did not know.

"She's pretty, isn't she?"

"Do you think so?" He looked over her shoulder. "She has been very pretty. It's Lady Hammond."

"Oh!" She dropped it as if it stung her. "Geoffrey's early love! Well, I admire his taste at all events."

She sat down with the unlit cigarette in her hand, and Julian went over to the supper-table to see if everything was there.

"Julian, I want to tell you something," she said. "Mrs. Maddison wanted to take me to Lady Hammond's last summer, but Geoffrey wouldn't hear of it. I didn't know about him then of course, but when I asked him why not, he told me I should probably meet you there as you were practically living with her. Was that true?"

"Who told you about Tremayne and Lady Hammond? Was it the same person?"

"Yes, why? That's true, isn't it?"

He came across to her. "I suppose so, I have never asked. It is not true that I ever lived with her, or with any one. I have always had this place since I returned to town, and she didn't come on tour. The rest of it is true, of course."

"I don't believe it, not of you!"

He winced. "I'm sorry."

"But—why? She is married, isn't she? I have heard you speak of her husband. Why, did you care for her?"

"No, not as you mean it. She is much older than I am, about fifteen years, I should say; but she has been very good to me."

"Is that enough then? You said that about Miss Hurst and Lord Lennox, but surely it's not worth it?"

"It's the same thing." He sat down beside her, leaning forward to light a cigarette so that she could not see his face, and he went on rather rapidly; "Iris, my dear, you are very young, and the stage is a rotten place. It's the only way to get on, from what I have seen; and I know that I could not have done what I have, nor be where I am, even with my voice, without Molly Hammond. She introduced me to Calvey, and she lent me the money to keep me going, not only decently, but well, until I was on my feet. She got me this flat and paid the rent. She lent me the car I drive. The money is paid back now, and I pay my own rent; but I can never pay her the rest—in money."

"This afternoon you spoke of Sylvia and the stage. You said she had never toured and had always played lead, yet you know that Sylvia had not a penny. She was working as a model in Raoul de Herencourt's studio in Paris when Calvey discovered her. He brought her over to London—bought her, if you like—and she lived at his flat for two years until she came out touring. That is how Sylvia achieved her success—and paid for it. That is why she left the stage, because she could not bear it any longer. She gave it up and left Calvey, preferring the shop and the Miss Deanes. Do you wonder, knowing what I do, and seeing what I have seen, how I hated the idea of your going on the stage? You had far better let Tremayne divorce you, and marry me. I can give you a cleaner life than that!"

Iris wondered dully why he had torn the scales from her eyes so roughly. "Life seems all upside down," she complained. "Yesterday I was so happy; why didn't you let me go on enjoying myself?"

"You have got to face things, Iris; I told you so this afternoon. If you are going to stay with us and work amongst us, you had better know the worst, and then you can protect yourself. You must not be ignorant on the stage, or anywhere else in real life."

"But it's all wrong—because you and Sylvia are good, good right through, and Mrs. Maddison is wicked, and yet people would call her good! It's all wrong, and I did want you to marry Sylvia, but I suppose you wouldn't now, after what you have told me about her."

"If I loved Sylvia I would marry her, because I know it wasn't her fault, any more than things have been my fault. Circumstances have been too strong for her; they were for me. But I don't think that every man, or a man worthy of Sylvia, would marry her, of course. Would Tremayne have married you?"

Iris shook her head. "Not he; he'd have made me marry you, and then it would have been all right."

"I hope it will be all right if it comes off now; I'll always be good to you, and I'll always be faithful to you. If I have not gone straight it's because I have had nothing to do so for, but I would have for you."

"Come and have some supper," he suggested presently. "What's the good of being miserable, and you look miserable to-night; more so than I have ever seen you look before."

"Yes, I feel it, I don't know why." She did not move, but sat and stared at the photograph of Lady Hammond. "Julian——"

"Yes?"

"Are you going back to her?"

His eyes followed hers. "No. Do you think I'd

have asked you to marry me, even some day, if I were ? ”

“ But—can you get away ? ”

“ I will ; it is finished, whether I ever get you or not. These last few weeks have taught me that, Iris. If I have done anything for you, you have done something for me, too. I think I should rather ask you if you would care to risk it with me now that you know ? ”

“ I think I would trust you anywhere in the whole world ! ”

He put out his hand as if to touch hers, but he stopped in time, dropped the cigarette he was holding, and turned away.

“ Come and have some supper,” he said, not too steadily, “ and some champagne ; I think we both need it.”

But when Julian would have toasted their “ future happiness,” she put down her glass and shook her head. “ No, I am still Geoffrey’s wife, and I don’t want him to divorce me ; it’s no use pretending I do. Even if he is tired of me, and if I don’t go back to him, but stay and work, I don’t want that.”

“ Wouldn’t you even if there was another woman ? ” He was half-jealous for a moment.

“ All men are the same,” she answered rather wearily. “ You are the same ; perhaps you would get tired too.”

“ You said a few minutes ago that you would trust me anywhere. If ever you are my wife——”

“ Oh, Julian, don’t ! ”

She got up, but he followed her. “ You shouldn’t talk like this ; it’s not fair to Geoffrey.”

Then he said something unlike the quiet Julian. “ Don’t you think I love you as much as he does ? And if you are going to bring up Molly Hammond against me, you will have to bring her up against him, too, you know ! Iris——” he caught hold of her——“ kiss me ! ”

"No."

"Why not? He wouldn't believe——"

"No."

"Don't you want to?" And that was what she could not answer, and did not know.

So she let him kiss her to find out; but her lips were cold, and almost at once she pushed him away.

"Julian, how could you! I hate to be kissed, and it's not fair. I'm Geoffrey's wife, and I shall never look him in the face again. You have made me ashamed of myself."

"What does it matter if you are not going back to him again?"

"It does matter, you know it does. I'm not wicked, and you ought not to have done it. I'll go now."

Much to her surprise he did not apologize, but after a minute he said: "If you go into my bedroom you will find a mirror there." Iris at first shot a glance of suspicion at him, but he met her eyes. "You can lock yourself in," he added, "you need not be afraid. I'm not a blackguard, and you are my guest."

"Of course." She went out, glad to get away from him, across the passage into the opposite room.

It was large and rather barely furnished in light grey, with a little bed with a pink eiderdown quilt; and pink curtains, and a grey carpet. On the dressing-table were Julian's silver and tortoiseshell toilet things, the counterpart of her own, and from the same giver, as she knew. There was a large photograph of Trelawn on one side of the room, and on the square table beside the bed a large framed photograph of Tremayne.

It had been taken just before their marriage (she had one in her sitting-room at Trelawn), and published as the best portrait ever taken of the composer and philanthropist.

The photograph showed him sitting on the edge of a table, in a characteristic attitude, looking straight

at the camera with his stern eyes, and those eyes followed one everywhere. They were looking at her now.

Iris felt them on her as she stood, slim and straight, in her pretty summer frock, in Julian Cassillis's bedroom at his flat, at past ten o'clock at night.

She went across and picked up the photograph.

"What are you doing here?" he seemed to ask. "And where are you going, and *why*?"

She wondered where he was, and if he were in town, or at the Cimric, or at Trelawn—her beautiful home.

It was May, and all the trees would be in bloom; the lilac and laburnum, the may and the judas trees. The roses would be budding on the south wall and the tulips covering the front terrace. And she was not there to see them!

A great wave of desolation swept over her. She wanted Trelawn, and she wanted Tremayne! Even if he scolded her, she wanted him. She had forgotten, and suddenly a ghost, laid by for a thousand years, had come and haunted her. She replaced the photograph and went to put on her hat, but the eyes followed her till she felt she could not bear them any more, and turned away. She wondered how Julian could bear them; but Julian had never wronged him; at least until that evening.

* * * * *

She dragged herself into the sitting-room again.

Julian was making coffee in an electric coffee-pot. He threw a swift glance at her, but she went to the couch and sat down without looking at him.

"I didn't know you had that photograph of Geoffrey," she said. "It's a good one, isn't it, but do you always have it there by your bedside?"

"Yes, always. I had it with me all the time I was touring. Why not? Tremayne was my first friend, and he is always the same to me, whatever has happened."

"I suppose so. I came between you——" She broke off and stared into space.

He poured out the coffee and brought her a cup.

"Julian," she said, "did you send me into your bedroom on purpose that I should see that photograph? I believe you did."

He put the coffee down. "Yes, I wanted to make you understand. I have shown you to-day where you are going. We have played all these weeks, and we can play no longer. I am a man now, Iris, not a boy, and I love you. If we go on together there is only one end to it, and I want you to see it before you go too far to turn back. It may be too late now; as I told you this afternoon, he may not take you back, but it will have to be settled soon."

"I know now. I didn't before. I'm getting frightened, Julian,"—she tried to laugh—"and—somehow, I want to go home."

"Home to Trelawn?"

"Yes, and to Geoffrey. Oh, you must think me a fool, but it was that photograph. It brought it home to me, and I want to see him again. I'm afraid of him, and he was horribly unkind—but I feel I must see him again and hear from him what he is going to do with me. Julian, if he wants me, I shall have to go back to him."

"Of course. Didn't you know that?" He did not seem surprised. "You will have to go back to him to find peace and be happy. You will never have happiness until you go home." He spoke quietly and finally. "That's it; he is your mate and you care for him, and you have always done so in spite of your protestations. I have always known it, and if you were to let him divorce you, and you married me, you would be miserable. That is why I let you come here to-night, and see that photograph. Iris, you must let him know where you are."

She nodded, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Let me tell him at least that you are safe and

well," he went on. "He cannot compel you to go back to him, you know, and you can always work if you decide to do so. I shall be here to stand by you, and so will Sylvia—but let me tell him, Iris. It's over two months now, and just think how he must have worried."

"I don't suppose he has," said Iris, shaking her head, "and probably he'll be horrid to me when he knows, but——" She broke off with a sigh and sat silent for a long time.

Then at last: "Yes, you can tell him," she said. "I don't suppose he will come and see me. He will probably send his lawyer to interview me about the separation." She hesitated a minute, then: "Yes, tell him where I am, and leave the rest to him."

A little later he took her home.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IN Tremayne's suite of rooms at the Hotel Cimric there was the usual gloom. It was not apparent, for the May morning was bright and sunny; there were flowers everywhere, and it was as rich and as luxurious as ever, but the gloom was there nevertheless.

March, the manservant, knew it, the hotel staff knew it, and Tremayne himself knew it.

It had been the longest two months in his life; ten weeks of waiting—first in anger, then hope, and then despair.

He had kept it to himself to begin with, but presently detectives had tried to find Iris, and failed; advertisements had appeared in *The Times* and other papers, but to no effect.

Mrs. Humphreys had tried, and Dr. Rutherford had tried; but the great city had been cleverer than the desert, and it had not given up its secret. Iris had disappeared, and he had nothing more to live for; that was just the fact.

It had been the sacrifice of the last remnant of his pride when he had written to Cassillis a month before, and the letter had remained unanswered. He had called at the theatre and had seen Calvey, but there was no information to be obtained. No one had seen or heard anything of a lady answering to Iris's description, neither had she been seen with Cassillis. As a matter of fact, very little was known of his private life at The Star. He went to the flat, but it was

the same there, and Cassillis had resolutely refused to be seen.

Trelawn had been closed now for seven months, and the flowers had bloomed for the gardeners' eyes alone. Tremayne had been there for a week in April, hoping that Iris might come back, but there was only silence and desolation.

Her rooms were shrouded in dust-sheets ; her cats were waiting for her in vain, the clothes she had not taken with her were still hanging in the wardrobes, and in the music-room the pianos were closed and the windows were shut, while still lying there was a dusty copy of "The Rosary" with "Julian Cassillis" scrawled across it.

It was all dead. . . .

There was money, and there was Trelawn ; there was the irreproachable name of Tremayne and the fame of all he had achieved as composer and philanthropist, but that was all ! The boy and girl he had loved had gone.

* * * * *

Tremayne did not breakfast until ten, for the days were long enough as it was ; and while he lingered over his dressing, March went down for the papers. When he came up he said : "There's a gentleman to see you, sir."

"Mr. Spenwick ?" (he was the lawyer).

"No, sir."

"Dr. Rutherford ?"

"N-no, sir," and something in the man's voice roused Tremayne.

"What is the matter with you ? Who is it ?"

"It's Mr. Cassillis, sir. They knew him in the office and sent him upstairs."

"Where is he—in the sitting-room ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you." And he went straight to the room. Cassillis was standing by the table.

"Good morning, Julian," said Tremayne as he came in and shut the door. "You are an early and unexpected visitor."

"Good morning," replied Julian, and his voice had the peculiar soft inflection which Tremayne recollected was always an evidence of his nervousness. "I hope I am not too early, but I was afraid of missing you if I came later. No—I think I won't shake hands with you until I have told you my mission, and perhaps then you won't want to. Perhaps you can guess——"

"You know where Iris is," said Tremayne quickly.

"Yes; she is quite well and safe."

"Where?"

Julian did not answer for a moment. "She is in town. She wanted to go on the stage, as you thought; but up to now I have kept her off it. Now she is going to do other work, unless——"

"You have kept her off it! How long have you known where she was, then?"

Julian shrank back. "I have known all along; I took her to the house where she is living now, ten weeks ago, when first she left home; and I have seen her every day since."

Tremayne took a step forward, as if he could have killed the young man, but Julian did not move.

"I wrote to you, and I came to see you."

"Yes, I am sorry, but I could not help it." He did not look at him, and continued: "I did not see you nor answer your letter for that very reason. I hate lying, and I had promised Iris I would not let you know, as otherwise she would not have trusted me and let me take care of her. It was only last night that she told me I could come and tell you, so you see I have lost no time. I am sorry——"

"Last night!" Tremayne looked at a calendar on the table. It was May 15, and he had arrived in London on March 4.

"She has been living in London all this time, and, you have seen her every day, and yet neither of you have even let me know if she was alive!"

Cassillis winced. "I know; you ought to have been told, of course, but Iris did not intend to return to you at all. I don't know, but she has told me——"

"What has she told you?" demanded Tremayne.

"Everything, I should think. She was under the impression that you would not be sorry to get rid of her."

"I?" in amazement.

"Well, she said you had agreed to a separation and she spoke of another woman."

Tremayne stared at him aghast, as if he thought him mad; then he said quietly: "I never heard such nonsense. There has never been any other woman in the world to me. She absolutely imagined it."

"She told me about Mrs. Maddison."

Tremayne swung round. "Mrs. Maddison is dead. If she told you that, she might also have told you that when she left Biskra at a moment's notice, Mrs. Maddison was very ill. I knew she was dying, but as Iris had been mixed up in the affair and had been through a good deal herself, I did not want to worry her unnecessarily by telling her that. She told you, I suppose, since she has made you her confidant, that I left her to go to Mrs. Maddison! I did. The poor woman was dying, and she had a confession to make to me concerning Iris. She died that night, and there was never the slightest foundation for the accusations which Iris has evidently been making against me."

"Personally, I never thought there was," returned Cassillis. "But I had to take her story as it stood, and I had to promise to keep her secret. I did not want her to go on the stage; I know what it is now, and she is too good for it." Then he went straight

on—"What do you intend to do about Iris? That's what I really came to ask you about. Are you going to see her? She does not know I have come here. I just told her I would let you know where she is. But I want to know what you intend to do before I give you her address."

Tremayne's face hardened. "What has that to do with you?" he demanded. "Do you expect my confidence, too? Give me my wife's address." Then he added: "Go! I will deal with her alone."

Julian looked at him with steady eyes; the table was between them, but to-day he would have fought.

"I am sorry," he said again, "but I don't intend you to see Iris until we have settled this question; and it has a lot to do with me. Apart from the fact that Iris has asked my help and, if you like to put it so, my protection, there is another point. Iris is afraid of you, and she wouldn't even discuss the question of returning to you until last night. She is happy where she is, and now that she has got work——"

"What sort of work, and what sort of a place is she living in?"

Cassillis told him in a few words.

"A London boarding-house!" said Tremayne dryly. "Good God! She must have found your company pleasing. And a shop! Really, I don't think Iris need have been afraid that I should force her to return to me. In fact, I don't know that I want her back if she prefers that mode of living. But possibly you have over-persuaded her!"

He strode across the room and back. When he spoke it was as if he were holding the fury of devils in check. "I am not sure that I want her back until I know a little more about what she has been doing all these weeks. What has she been living on? Had she money, or have you been keeping her?"

"I have not. She had sufficient money of her own, and she has been living alone. But I quite

expected you to take it like this. This is the point—to what extent are you going to suspect her, and have you any intention of divorcing her ? ”

Tremayne fell back a little and his face went rather grey. He looked as if he had had a blow from an unexpected quarter.

“ I wonder what you mean. Is there another reason why you have come to me this morning ? Is there a reason why I should divorce Iris ? ”

Cassillis did not move. “ There is no real reason, but you might be able to find evidence if you looked for it, and wanted to ; therefore I would rather put it plainly before you now. If you want to get rid of Iris, or if you feel that you can’t believe her and don’t want to take her back, why see her ? If you choose to divorce her, we shall not defend the case, and she has promised to marry me afterwards.”

Tremayne stared out of the window. There was no movement, and Cassillis could not see his face. “ I want to save her all I can,” he went on in the same level tone, “ and it would be far better for her to be divorced and then to marry me, than to be alone, and go on the stage, or even into a shop. I would look after her. I would not let her work, and I could give her all she would want. I think she’d even be happy in time, though, of course——” He broke off, for suddenly Tremayne had turned. He looked grey and old.

“ Come over here,” he ordered, and Cassillis went at once.

They stood face to face in the patch of sunlight by the window, their eyes level.

Tremayne was larger and older, but there was something very charming about the young man, something which belied his life, and all that Tremayne believed of him. It puzzled him not a little as he looked at the boy he had loved, hated, and lost.

“ Julian,” he said, “ long ago we were friends—you and I. I do not think there ever was confidence

between us, though I once thought there was, but for the sake of that friendship, and what you once thought of me, tell me the truth now. Does Iris care for you? Are you talking of divorce because you and she want me to divorce her? I am not judging you guilty, but is there a moral reason for your asking me?"

"No."

"Tell me the truth, whatever it is, because if it is so, and she cares for you, I will set her free. I would a thousand times rather she were happy with you than unhappy with me, and I have no wish to hold her even as my wife in name only, if she would rather be yours. Only, for God's sake let there be frankness and truth between us now!"

"I am speaking the truth," answered Cassillis. "Iris does not care for me. She never did, and she never will. Why——" He gave a queer little laugh. "Do you think I should be here if she did? Do you think I should have waited all this time to bring you the news? I should have written you long ago, and we should have been off somewhere—to find heaven! But it's not I; Iris loves *you*. I think she always did, but you could never see it."

Tremayne looked at him steadily. "But you love her?"

"You know I do, and I have never pretended not to; but I have been nothing but a friend to her, and that I can swear to you before God. You don't understand Iris, you haven't made her happy and she's afraid of you. You're jealous and suspicious, and you think with her, as you thought with me, that money is the only thing; that if you are generous and give her a beautiful home, beautiful clothes, and good things to eat, that is all that matters. But it isn't. Iris has been happier at this boarding-house than ever she was at Trelawn; she has had me to take her about, and she's got a girl friend—a girl I know, and we've all been happy. It's my fault that it has come to an end, because I wanted to tell you. There's been

no wrong in anything we have done; we don't need to be beastly to be happy, but every one can't see it. Iris was at my flat last night till nearly eleven o'clock. Yes, I've told you on purpose. There is no secret in it, and we don't care who knows, but if there had been anything to be ashamed of I should not have told you. Can't you see that? Iris is as true as steel to you, and I don't believe the man lives who could tempt her from you. If I could not, there is no other man."

"And you did try?" said Tremayne slowly.

"Yes, I did try, not for my own sake, but because I had to be certain before I came to you. I could not have told you this otherwise; you are so blind, you would never see."

This time Tremayne did not answer. He stared down at the polished table, gripping it with his hands, his face impassive, until Cassillis could bear it no longer.

"I beg your pardon if I have said too much," he added, and there was a slight stammer in his voice. "But I have been responsible for all the trouble, and I want, as far as I can, to put things right. I will give you Iris's address now, and I know you will do what is right—you always do!"

He turned away, but Tremayne swung quickly round. "You would not shake hands with me when you came in, Julian," he said. "Will you now—now that I understand?"

Cassillis stopped. "Of course, if you want to. I didn't think you would."

"I think you are blind, too." Tremayne held out his hand. "Julian, you are a gentleman, and a sportsman!" The boy's hand was as cold as ice. "I didn't know a young man like you had it in him to care like that for a woman."

Cassillis turned away his head. "I have always cared," he said truthfully. "But I have never intentionally wronged you by word or deed. I have

always cared too much for you. Shall we go now? I have my car here, and if you like I will drive you round to Iris; but perhaps you are not ready——”

“Oh, I am ready enough,” there was a touch of bitterness in his tone. “Breakfast can wait, and I suppose we are certain to find her in; I don’t want another fruitless journey like the last.”

“She will wait for me; there is no chance of her being out. I go round to see her every morning. She does not know you will come, of course, as we had no idea how you would take it.”

“Then Iris is blind, too,” said Tremayne with a smile.

They went out and downstairs, breakfast forgotten; for it was obvious that Cassillis was in a hurry, and anxious to get the interview over. Tremayne could not blame him either; for he had the sensation of torturing a delicate creature to death.

Outside in the courtyard Cassillis’s car was waiting.

“A car!” smiled Tremayne. “You have done well, Julian.”

“It is only mine for use,” replied Cassillis. “It belongs to Lady Hammond.”

Tremayne drew his brows together quickly in a frown.

“You have been driving Iris about in Lady Hammond’s car!”

“I didn’t think it would hurt her,” he replied calmly. “Nor that Lady Hammond would hurt her either. The car is the same as any other car, and we have been able to get out and enjoy ourselves in it. I have not taken her to Lady Hammond’s house.”

“You haven’t?”

“No, she is out of town and they have not met.”

“I suppose Iris knows, though?”

“Yes, she knows it all.” For a second their eyes met again, and Tremayne nodded.

“And it is finished,” added Julian under his breath.

“I am glad of that,” replied Tremayne, and said no more.

CHAPTER XL

CASSILLIS opened the door of the house in Wilbraham Road, and went in, Tremayne following him.

He said good morning to one of the grey-haired Miss Deanes who came to see who it was. "Is Mrs. Tremayne in?"

"I expect so, Mr. Cassillis; she always waits for you, doesn't she?" and she looked at his companion with a little curiosity.

"This is Mr. Tremayne," said Cassillis. "I think we had better go up into the drawing-room."

He went to the bottom of the staircase, and sang out "Iris!" just as, Tremayne remembered, he used to call her at Trelawn, and from somewhere above came back the answer: "Is that you, Julian? Come up into the drawing-room, will you?"

"Will you come up?" Cassillis said to Tremayne, and went first up the shiny, spotless, linoleum-covered stairs. There was a landing at the top, and several doors. He went across to one, and at the same moment another door opened and Iris came out.

Tremayne saw her first, and gave an exclamation which startled her, and she backed quickly against the door out of which she had come.

"Oh, Julian, how could you!" she cried, though quietly, "this isn't fair."

She wore a plain tweed coat and skirt, and a pretty straw hat. She looked well and young; but when she saw Tremayne, and he went across to her, she turned as white as a sheet.

He held out his hand to her. "Good morning. Aren't you going to speak to me, Iris?"

"Good morning. What—what do you want?"

"To talk to you. Come into your drawing-room——"

Iris looked at Julian. "Did you bring him, Julian? Oh, you might have told me. I don't want to talk to you——"

"Come into the drawing-room, Iris," said Cassillis quietly. "Just a minute."

It was Tremayne's bitterest humiliation that she went to Cassillis when he held out his hand.

"Oh, well, if you come, too, Julian," she said, "but don't go and leave me alone with Geoffrey." She laughed, half in tears. "I'm so frightened of you," she told him, "and I hate to be scolded. Julian will tell you I have not done anything wrong."

She passed him and went into the room; Julian and Tremayne followed.

"I have told Mr. Tremayne the whole story," said Cassillis. "And it's all right. He understands now, and won't scold you. I will wait downstairs." But Iris clung to his hand.

"No, no, don't go," she begged. "Why should you? I won't go back to Trelawn unless you come too—I won't!"

"There is no reason why he should not come," said Tremayne, forcing himself to speak quietly. "But just now, Julian understands I want to speak to you alone. He has told me about you, and I have tried to understand your motive; I will not scold you."

Iris shook her head. She was obviously frightened, though neither of them quite knew of what.

"I won't stay unless Julian stays too. You were horribly unkind to me at Biskra, and I hated it. Besides, there is nothing he may not hear, as I have told him everything."

"Apparently; you also seem to have told him that he could come and tell me where you were; if you

did not want me, why did you do that? Didn't you expect I should come?"

"Not at once. I didn't know what you would do. I—" she took courage and looked at him, "I hope Mrs. Maddison is better now?"

"Mrs. Maddison is dead," answered Tremayne quietly; and in a few words he told her what had happened at Biskra, poignant words which brought stinging tears to her eyes.

"I knew she was dying," he added, just as he had said to Julian; "and you had no reason to go off as you did, without even leaving a note to say where you had gone."

"You did not want me," said Iris in rather a low voice. "You told me that I could go; you didn't believe I should, and that I could live without your help. You said that you would arrange a separation between us, and——"

"I think that suggestion came from you, and after some very uncalled-for accusations against Mrs. Maddison and myself. You might, at least, have had some faith in me, and in my word, and not believed all she told you!"

Iris did not answer, but traced lines on the polished table with her finger and did not look up.

"I think I might go," put in Julian then. "Do let me go, Iris, there's a dear girl. I want to beg a cup of tea from Miss Deane. I have had no breakfast."

"Just a minute, Julian," said Tremayne. "While you are here I think we may as well have it out. Iris—I have told Julian that if you wish it I will divorce you, and set you free to marry him; what do you wish?"

Iris looked up at Julian. "Oh," she said, under her breath. "How could you suggest it, Julian? I don't want to be divorced!"

"Then will you come back to me? You will have to do one or the other; and you must make up your mind, and now. We cannot continue like this."

There was no answer, and after a minute Tremayne looked at Cassillis standing waiting, and asked: "Will you go? I think I can do better with Iris alone."

"No," she caught at him, but Tremayne held her hand. "As man to man, Cassillis, may I appeal to you? We will see you later."

"Yes," returned Julian. "Of course," and he went to the door. From there he looked back. "You will be good to her, won't you?" he said.

Iris moved and sat down, her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands. She was trembling a little, and ready to cry.

Tremayne went across to the window and stood for a moment looking out, as if he fought with himself. Then he came back and put his hand on her shoulder. "I don't think we'll argue," he said quietly. "You don't want me to divorce you?" She shook her head.

"Why not? I could. Cassillis tells me you were at his flat last night until eleven o'clock!"

"Yes, I know, but there was nothing wrong."

"Perhaps not, and yet I think you must have cared a great deal for any man, especially an actor, to go alone to his flat, and remain until that hour."

"I don't think we were there very long. We had been on the river, and did not get back until nearly eight. I am fond of Julian. I always have been, but I don't want to marry him; if I had, I should have done it long ago, for you are wrong when you say, and think, that I married you for your money."

"What did you marry me for, then?"

But that she would not answer.

"You will have to marry him if I divorce you. I should make it a condition."

"I only went to him because he is so good. I knew he would help me like a brother."

"That is nonsense. Julian does not care for you like a brother; he was perfectly frank with me this

morning, and told me he had always loved you, and wished to marry you if I would set you free."

"I have told him I don't want to. I don't care for him at all like that."

"Then whom do you care for, and why did you run away from me? You're rather inconsistent, you know; you carried my letter about—oh, but I found it in your room, so do not deny it. Mrs. Maddison told me about it, too, before I saw it; I should like to know why you did it, and why you would not tell me!"

Iris did not speak, but a tear rolled down and splashed on the table; she covered it up, but another fell on her hand.

"Iris, will you come back to me as my wife?" he asked. "Will you let us start all over again, and blot out this long estrangement?"

She did not answer, but her head drooped.

"Come back with me now, to the Cimric," went on Tremayne. "And let us try again. I have been very blind, but Cassillis opened my eyes this morning and I will make you happy this time."

"I was so very unhappy," she spoke scarcely above a whisper. "I don't think I could go through it all again. Even before you knew, I dreaded it so, for I knew what you would be like."

"But I know everything now, so that need never come between us again. Iris—be kind to me! give me another chance——"

"Kind to you!" She tried to laugh.

"Yes, don't you think you have been unkind long enough? Don't you think I have had enough anxiety. I have been very unhappy, you know. It is nine weeks since I came home, and I have not known whether you were alive or dead. And—Trelawn is waiting for you—won't you come home?"

"I shall have to leave Julian."

"He can come, too, as soon as he feels that he can."

"And Sylvia!"

"She shall come as well. Bring them all! but for God's sake come back yourself. It's just like a wilderness without you—and you are mine."

She knew it—and did not protest.

"You can't escape me. You have belonged to me all the years while I waited for you to grow up, till I could claim you. You could not let me divorce you and marry Cassillis—you could not do it! I may have been unkind and anything you like. I am a jealous brute—pile it on, I don't care, but whatever I am, master or slave, you are mine, and I am your mate." He caught her suddenly and held her in a grip of steel, looking into her eyes. "I love you!" he told her, and it was one of the very few times he had said it. "And you are my wife! Do you think I am going to give you up to Cassillis? Never in this world! I'd kill you first!"

This was so utterly unlike Tremayne that Iris began to laugh, half-hysterically. "Oh, I wish you would!" she cried. "It would be nice if you would do even that, rather than scold me. I don't care!" and then she sobbed:

"Geoffrey—do you really want me?"

"You know I want you."

"Will you forgive and forget?"

"We'll never speak of it again."

"Will you be kind to me? I'm afraid of you, you know!"

"There's nothing to be afraid of if you care for me, and sometimes I have thought you do——"

"I always did—I think I have loved you all my life!"

It was out at last! And she quickly put up her hands to hide her face, ashamed of her confession.

Tremayne pulled them down again, almost roughly.

"Say that again!" he said. "Say you love me and I'll forgive you anything in the world. I always would have done, but it was the thought that you loved Julian, and only married me out of a sense of

duty, and for my cursed money. Oh, why on earth didn't you tell me so before ! But I suppose that, too, was my fault."

"I was afraid to—I thought you didn't want me any more, and would tell me not to be a little fool—but Julian knew."

He drew her into his arms, and Iris put hers round his neck and clung tightly to him ; and there, at last, was the peace she had craved, sought, and never until then found.

THE END